Literary Critique

ISSN : 3049-4435

Issue-2

July-December 2025

A Refereed (Peer-reviewed)
Bi-annual Research Journal

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E-mail : literarycritique@khalsacollege.edu.in

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Subscription Type		Amount
Ten-Year/Life Membership	:	3000
Five-Year Subscription	:	1800
Single Issue	:	200

Online Payment : **A/c : 50200049606061 IFSC : HDFC0001407**

HDFC Bank, Ranjit Avenue, Amritsar

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Published by

P.G. Department of English

Khalsa College Amritsar

Printed at Printwell 146, Focal Point, Amritsar

AIM

The journal, *Literary Critique,* aims to provide a high-quality platform for the dissemination of original research in the field of English literature and language. The journal seeks to nurture a culture of critical inquiry and aesthetic appreciation among scholars, academicians, and literary thinkers. It envisions enriching academic discourse with society oriented criticism, rigorous scholarship**,** interdisciplinary engagement**,** and innovative theoretical perspectives that challenge and broaden conventional boundaries of interpretation.

SCOPE

Literary Critique provides a platform for scholarly inquiry in the fields of literature and language, with a commitment to social, ethical, and literary concerns. The journal encourages research that examines injustice, marginalisation, and discrimination, and explores the intersections of literary and linguistic studies with fields such as sociology, psychology, environmental studies, and subaltern studies. Through interdisciplinary scholarship grounded in contemporary critical frameworks, it envisions promoting research that addresses environmental concerns and contemporary social, cultural, and political issues to create a heightened awareness of both local and global literary traditions.

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(Issue-3) January-June 2026

We invite submission of original, unpublished scholarly papers addressing any aspect of English Language, Literature, and Culture. Submissions will undergo a rigorous blind peer-review process conducted by the subject experts. The papers that fulfill academic standards will be accepted for publication.

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   The first page must include the following details below the title of the manuscript:
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   Manuscripts containing typographical, grammatical, or punctuation errors will be rejected without review.
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   References must be complete, accurate, and consistent. Submissions with incomplete or inconsistent citations will be rejected.
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- Keywords: 4-5

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Last Date for submission : May 15, 2026

For Enquiry: 8427754937, 9876102149

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Issue-2 (July-December 2025)
Bi-Annual

Issue – 2 2025

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EDITORIAL

The present issue is the outcome of a sustained inquiry, revision, and critical engagement. The journal, even at this early stage, has engaged scholars of significant intellectual repute and expanded its ambit nationwide. Such engagement attains its full meaning when one recognises the transformative power of literature itself. Literature is not simply a reflection of the world but a constructive force that needs to be judiciously understood and every drop of nectar oozing out of it should be well preserved. Creative discourse, when looked at historically, lays out clear patterns of the mainstream and the periphery, and it becomes mandatory for today's scholarly inquiry to resist exclusion in this age of divisions and asymmetric cultural structures. Thus, *Literary Critique* takes on the epistemic responsibility of recovering the voices that were denied representation in the written tradition.

The papers selected for the issue address, most fittingly, the ethical urgency of the times and the major concerns in their full breadth - namely, the investigation of hegemonic structures, marginalised voices, ecological consciousness, gendered subjectivity, and artistic forms of popular culture.

The reading of Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* through the lens of Marah Gubar revisits childhood to destabilise the Victorian construction of the child as a silent and innocent recipient of adult wisdom. Gubar reconfigures children's literature and Wittgenstein's "family resemblance" model to demonstrate how Carroll's Alice inhabits morally complex zones of crime, justice, and transgression. Wonderland does not remain merely a fantasy space, but it becomes a theatre in which the child questions the legitimacy of adult authority. The examination of Dahl's *Matilda* exposes the grotesque caricature of adult figures and hierarchical power. Yet, it moves beyond the narrative of child empowerment; it reveals the paradox at the heart of Dahl's text - Matilda's triumph depends upon adult-like intellectual maturity. The paper does not simply overturn the child-adult dichotomy; it suggests that childhood in literature is a complicated and discursive battlefield.

Through the study of unreliable narration in *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*, the paper foregrounds not merely a technical narrative device but also the cognitive, political, and historical frameworks it unsettles. Narrative form itself becomes an insurgent space, and the spectral narrator's disembodiment emerges as an act of resistance against state-controlled hegemonic discourse of violence in 1980s Sri Lanka. Here, memory is not individual but collective; amnesia is historical; the ghost becomes witness. Similarly, the reading of August Strindberg's tragedy, *Miss Julie,* through Michel de Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactic - supported by theoretical insights of Foucault, Althusser, Gramsci, and James C. Scott - redefines it as a drama of everyday resistance. Beyond the fictional world, the speech-act analysis of Greta Thunberg's climate rhetoric demonstrates how speech operates as action and becomes a performative force to reshape climate discourse. The paper on testimonial literature shifts the focus from narratives of suffering to what it calls the "aesthetics of generative resistance"- a creative resistance. The margin emerges not merely as a site of deprivation but as a space of world-building. Through solidarity, ritual, and shared language, literature imagines alternative social orders.

Gendered subjectivity and spatial politics explored in Natalia Ginzburg's *The Dry Heart* reconfigure Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* by transforming the traditionally intimate spaces - bedrooms, studies, kitchens - into an architecture of isolation and psychological captivity. The so-called nurturing domestic interior becomes a zone of emotional barrenness structured by patriarchal sexual scripts. The analysis of Living Smile Vidya's autobiographical narrative *I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* deepens the inquiry into transgender subjectivity. Their life is nothing short of a contradiction, as they are invisible and, at the same time, hyper-visible. Society refuses to regard them as humans in the first place. Their bodies are merely considered sites of pleasure, consequently making them victims of abuse and exploitation in the most traumatic ways. Literature, in this context, performs the crucial task of rehumanisation.

Furthermore, there are studies that foreground the instability of national, familial, and personal identities under conditions of historical turbulence. War, nation, and belonging are addressed with acute sensitivity in the exploration of contemporary Ukrainian poetry by Iya Kiva and Lyuba Yakimchuk. Political

violence infiltrates domestic space and dissolves the boundary between public conflict and private life. The paper underscores that war extends beyond the battlefields. The dialectical tension between citizenship and identity in "Jasmine's Father" and "Mammie's Form at the Post Office" further complicates the notion of belonging. Citizenship, as legal affirmation, does not guarantee psychological security. When legal recognition collides with lived experience, alienation emerges.

Alongside these engagements with power and subjectivity, the issue also interrogates cultural form and evolving linguistic practice. The cultural critique of animality in Marvel comics investigates anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism. Superheroes who blur the boundary between human and nonhuman destabilise the binary that Western philosophy has long sustained. Through Nietzsche's notion of the human possibility to transcend itself, the paper exposes both the allure and danger of superhuman aspiration and suggests that hybridity rather than dominance may offer a more ethical paradigm.

The study of Sudha Murty's *Wise and Otherwise* turns to everyday human encounters to explore the moral and psychological textures of contemporary life, where generosity, prejudice, compassion, and self-deception shape ordinary existence. Another equally significant contemporary concern is the exploration of "Grammar in the Digital Age". Analysis of social media discourse reveals how punctuation, abbreviation, and syntactic looseness reflect not decline but an adaptive response to the communicative needs of our times. In the digital sphere, this disruption of established norms paves the way for new conventions, challenging the rigidity of prescriptive grammar. Literary criticism, in acknowledging such shifts, expands its purview beyond canonical texts to the living ecology of language itself.

The current issue does not offer a single thematic unity but a plurality of critical orientations. Yet beneath this plurality lies a shared conviction: that literature is never inert. It is entangled with power, inscribed by ideology, animated by resistance, and responsive to historical change. Whether through children who challenge adult authority, ghosts who testify against the state, activists who weaponize speech, poets who mourn fractured homes, or digital users who reshape grammar, each text becomes a site where meaning is contested and remade.

With this second issue, *Literary Critique* continues its commitment to rigorous and theoretically engaged scholarship that recognises literature as a dynamic field of inquiry. It demonstrates methodological plurality - from speech-act theory to ecocriticism, from feminist spatial analysis to cultural studies, from narratology to digital linguistics. In times marked by ideological polarisation, environmental precarity, and rapid technological transformation, the work of critique acquires renewed urgency. The issue stands as an affirmation of that responsibility - an ongoing conversation that opens spaces of inquiry, dissent, and imagination, and it is in this demand that the future of critique resides.

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Sexual Scripts and The Poetics of Isolation: Female Subjectivity and Metaphorical Space in Ginzburg's *The Dry Heart*

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Abstract

This paper explores how sexual scripts shape the architecture of isolation in Natalia Ginzburg's *The Dry Heart*. "The Poetics of Isolation" is Ginzburg's feminist reworking of Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, where Bachelard saw the house as nurturing imagination and intimacy. Domestic interiors - bedroom, study, kitchen- become architectures of exclusion and emotional barrenness. The poetics of isolation thus describes how space articulates emotional alienation: doors that divide, drawers that conceal, walls that mute communication. Isolation becomes both a spatial condition and a psychical state: Ginzburg writes estrangement into the material environment of the home, reimagining intimacy as the terrain of captivity. It argues that the protagonist's emotional and spatial confinement originates from patriarchal scripts of femininity. Through the Bachelardian lens, the study examines how these gendered roles materialise in distinct spatial zones-Alberto's study, the marital bedroom, the house, and San Remo-each transforming from a potential site of intimacy into one of alienation. Ginzburg's narrative rewires Bachelard's ideal of the nurturing home into a poetics of isolation, where domestic spaces mirror the psychological consequences of repressed desire and emotional neglect. The interplay between sexual conditioning and spatial estrangement exposes how post-war ideals of womanhood are not only in behaviour but also in the physical structure of the home.

Keywords- Natalia Ginzburg, The Dry Heart, Poetics of Space, Sexual Scripts, Domestic Interior, Post-war Italian Literature

Introduction

Natalia Ginzburg's *The Dry Heart* unfolds an atmosphere of spatial and

psychological suffocation, where domestic architecture becomes a silent witness to the dissolution of female interiority, rather than functioning as a positive catalyst. The spatial environment in the text is densely metaphorical - its rooms, walls, and corners reverberate with the protagonist's dislocation and muted resistance. This paper explores the phenomenological entanglement between space and gendered subjectivity in *The Dry Heart*, drawing on Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and the theoretical framework of sexual script theory developed by John Gagnon and William Simon. Through this intersection, the study investigates how space is not just merely inhabited by the female subject but actively shapes, constrains, and reflects her experience of selfhood under patriarchal narratives.

Bachelard's spatial phenomenology of poetic space dwells on nativity or primitiveness of being attached to a personal space of the domestic interior, which acts as a site of psychic resonance, where spaces such as houses, rooms, attics, cellars, drawers and corners become repositories for long-held memories, dreams, and humble expressions of emotions. But in Ginzburg's text, these intimate spatialities are stripped of their protective and imaginative functions. The home, instead of serving as a vessel for reverie or retreat, becomes a topography of gendered entrapment, a spatialized inscription of emotional barrenness and disconnection. Read parallelly with the lens of sexual script theory, which posits that gendered and sexual behaviours are learned, performed and socially coded, the protagonist's spatial confinement mirrors her subjection to an inherited femininity that allows little room for authentic agency or desire.

This paper argues that Ginzburg mobilises space as a phenomenological extension of the female subject's crisis, a crisis born of occupying both physical and symbolic interiors that preclude genuine intimacy or self-articulation. The protagonist's experience of the home is filtered through a consciousness that believes in the scripts it has been given to perform. But eventually, her increasing detachment is not merely psychological but ontological; the domestic space no longer constitutes a house of being in Bachelardian terms, but a hollow architecture of social expectation.

The house of being in Bachelard's poetics is a metaphor for how the home provides the first architecture of the self, an imaginative and emotional structure that gives shelter and possibility of dreaming. The culmination of

violence, which is stark, affectless, and unmoored from dramatic catharsis, emerges as a spatial rupture, a breaking of the sexual script that the space itself had once embodied. According to John H. Gagnon and William Simon, the breaking of a sexual script refers to moments when individuals or groups disrupt the established social norms and expectations that govern sexual behaviour (4-7). In their theory, sexuality is not instinctive or purely biological but socially scripted-people learn how to desire, behave, and relate sexually through cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic scripts. These scripts dictate how men and women are expected to perform desire, intimacy, and power (3-12).

The concepts- rebellion and resistance are not as overt or strategic political acts, but as emotional gestures, quiet refusals embedded in spatial and psychological withdrawal. The protagonist's rebellion is perceived rather than articulated; it happens within gestures of detachment, silence, and eventual rupture. Her murder of Alberto is described as a spatial revolt, not ideological, but existential - an attempt to break free from the invisible space of feminine obedience. This resistance is not strategic or collective, but phenomenological - a revolt of being itself against a condition of non-being. Ginzburg transforms domestic isolation into a silent rebellion, showing how withdrawal and alienation become acts of resistance when no other agency is possible

By situating *The Dry Heart* at the intersection of spatial phenomenology and feminist theory, this paper examines how Ginzburg's narrative dramatises the slow erosion of female subjectivity under the weight of architectural and sexual scripts. In doing so, the novella reveals how space, far from being inert, participates in the gendering of consciousness, structuring not only how women live, but how they come to know themselves as unknowable within the confines of domestic life.

The Scripted Self

The protagonist is a woman of quiet manners, withdrawn social presence, and muted affect. She is neither dramatic nor volatile, but instead appears to move through her life with a numbed compliance to what is expected of her. Her personality is marked by a subdued intensity-a longing to be loved or seen, though she can barely admit it to herself. This longing, however, is consistently routed through a logic of resignation, as though she has long

understood that she does not possess the attributes that traditionally confer desirability or feminine power. She is aware of her ordinariness, her lack of glamour, and her social invisibility, and these perceptions calcify into a self-image built on inadequacy. Rather than resisting the constraints of the feminine script, she folds herself into them, allowing herself to become small, compliant, and emotionally available in the ways women are culturally expected to be, even as those very gestures are never met with genuine affection.

This script also shapes her impression of the opposite sex: men, particularly-her husband. Never viewed as an emotional equal, but as a distant arbiter of approval or neglect. She does not fantasise about passion so much as she clings to the idea of being chosen, as though romantic attachment was less a matter of shared feeling than of achieving proximity to masculine indifference. Her husband's coldness, his affairs, his intellectual posturing, and his lack of emotional intimacy do not provoke in her anger or confrontation but a slow, internal erosion-a dry kind of despair. She never fully articulates her desire because she never performed a script in which female desire is central or even permitted. Instead, she performs a version of heterosexual femininity that is structurally destined to be unreciprocated: to wait, to yearn, to adapt, to remain.

Even her ultimate act of violence, the murder of her husband, is delivered without effect, as though it were the final punctuation to a life lived in parentheses. The inability of the protagonist to inhabit her own desire, to vocalise discontent, or to see herself as a subject worthy of love stems from the internalisation of a sexual script that codes femininity as silent endurance. She does not love him; she does not even like him, perhaps- but she has learned to inhabit the role of wife, the role of woman, as though her own emotions were external to the structure she must uphold.

Other Characters within the Masculine Script

In Natalia Ginzburg's *The Dry Heart*, the characters Augusto, Giovanna, and Francesca function within what can be called the masculine sexual and emotional script, a set of socially encoded behaviours and expectations that define gendered power relations in post-war Italian society. Ginzburg's narrative exposes how this masculine script regulates intimacy, desire, and communication, rendering female subjectivity fragmented and emotionally alienated.

Augusto embodies the core of this masculine script. He represents emotional restraint, detachment, and the privilege of distance- traits traditionally associated with male authority and rationality. His affective withdrawal defines the structure of the relationship: he sets the emotional terms, remaining elusive and self-contained while the female narrator revolves around his indifference. His ability to move between women (Giovanna and later Francesca) without visible remorse reveals how the masculine subject maintains control through emotion as a tool. Augusto's behaviour naturalises the patriarchal idea that men possess the right to emotional freedom and sexual autonomy, while women are confined to longing, waiting, and self-effacement.

Giovanna, by contrast, internalises the expectations of this masculine order. She functions within the script as the ideal feminine figure - obedient, silent, and accommodating. Her existence validates Augusto's masculine identity by providing a mirror of submission and dependability. Giovanna's presence in the narrative represents the continuity of patriarchal normalcy: she embodies the kind of woman who sustains the masculine ego by absorbing emotional neglect without resistance. Through Giovanna, Ginzburg reveals how patriarchal scripts sustain themselves through women's complicity and habitual endurance.

Francesca, on the other hand, initially appears as a possible disruption to this script. Her relationship with Augusto unfolds outside the domestic sphere, suggesting the potential for a freer, more modern female role. However, even Francesca ultimately becomes another figure through which the masculine script reasserts control. Her relationship with Augusto follows the same trajectory of dependence and disappointment, revealing that even rebellion against the norms still takes shape within the same patriarchal structure. Francesca thus mirrors the narrator's entrapment, exposing how the masculine script adapts rather than dissolves when challenged.

Houses of the Protagonist: A Dislocation

The family lives in Maona, where her childhood home is situated. Yet for the child protagonist, this space does not elevate; it traps her in routines of emotional distance and silent observation. Her mother, preoccupied with domestic chores-drying tomatoes in the sun -is absorbed in practical, sustaining labour, a quiet performance of feminine duty with little warmth or expression.

The rhythm of her work is slow, habitual, and affectively inaccessible to the child, who watches but does not participate.

In the kitchen, the father and mother, along with the local vet and the tax collector, gather in the evenings to play chess. This activity, calm and controlled, is emblematic of the household's emotional temperature: low, disciplined, and orderly. The father, in particular, is a figure of domestic authority and emotional detachment, maintaining a quiet dominance within the household. His role is indifferent; also punitive. He would rap the young protagonist's fingers with a cane, a correction that instils not only fear but also a sense of bodily violation and the conditioning of silence.

Bachelard writes that "the house shelters daydreaming" (78); yet in Maona, the protagonist's inner life must seek refuge not in the airy garret but in a coal cellar-a cry from the vertical transcendence of Bachelard's poetics. Vertical transcendence in Bachelard's poetics is the upward movement of the imagination and spirit, expressed through the symbolic geometry of the house.

The house's vertical axis- from cellar to attic-becomes a metaphor for the soul's own vertical journey, where ascending is dreaming, and dreaming is a way of transcending being itself (Bachelard 17-20). The cellar, in Bachelard's theory, is associated with the unconscious, with fear, the dark, and the repressed-the hidden and the buried aspects of the psyche (18-20). Here, the protagonist finds her true place of retreat and resistance. She hides not only from her father's discipline but also from the entire affective architecture of home. It is in this refuge that she keeps and reads her copy of *From Slave Girl to Queen*-a text that is deeply symbolic of a nascent yet unfulfilled desire for self-liberation.

Alberto's Study: The Uninhabitable Intellectual Space

Alberto's study in *The Dry Heart* functions as the most telling spatial embodiment of marital estrangement. While Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space,* conceives of the study as a site of reverie and intellectual sanctuary where thought unfolds in silence, Ginzburg inverts this vision. Alberto's study becomes a power nucleus, a room that establishes a boundary between husband and wife rather than a shared intellectual space. The protagonist is kept outside its walls, and the door that separates her from Alberto is more than architectural; it is symbolic of the irreparable fracture within their marriage.

Far from nourishing intimacy, the study is a physical manifestation of tensions and uncertainties. Its drawers, chests and cabinets, which in Bachelard's analysis, are meant to hold secrets that stimulate wonder and imaginative intimacy, here provoke fear and alienation. The protagonist confesses her unease: the narrow, hideous drawers inspire not curiosity but dread, their closed and impenetrable nature reflecting Alberto's emotional inaccessibility. The chest or drawer, which Bachelard describes as a miniature cosmos where "the intimate is concentrated," (85-90) becomes in Ginzburg's rendering- a miniature abyss; an architectural sign of discourteousness and concealment. What should safeguard the delicate secrets of domestic life instead harbours estrangement, reinforcing the wife's exclusion**.**

Bedroom of Alberto's House: A Prickly Nest

In Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, the bedroom is often conceived as a "nest" (109), a protective and nurturing site of intimacy where human vulnerability is sheltered and reciprocated. The nest, for Bachelard, is a poetic image of the soul's dwelling-a fragile, intimate, and nurturing enclosure that mirrors how beings build worlds of tenderness and protection amid vastness and vulnerability. Yet in Natalia Ginzburg's *The Dry Heart*, the marital bedroom of Alberto and the protagonist radically subverts this vision. Instead of offering warmth and security, it becomes a ruptured, prickly nest-a space where closeness turns into estrangement, and intimacy wounds rather than protects.

The protagonist attempts repeatedly to seep into this bedroom space, to transform it into a chamber of mutual intimacy, but each attempt is resisted by Alberto's indifference and her own growing disillusionment. The very vulnerability she offers in this space, rather than being cradled, is turned against her. She feels herself exposed, as if a fragile twig were bruising her sanctity, her long-held notion of the desirable nurtured since childhood. The nest, instead of sheltering, pierces and unsettles, becoming a hostile architecture of intimacy. This prickliness of the bedroom produces a sustained negotiation within the protagonist's psyche. She battles between obsession and despair, between the compulsion to cling to him and the awareness that such attachment corrodes her sense of self. Her conscience erodes piece by piece within these walls.

San Remo: A Distant Miniature

In "The Poetics of Space", Bachelard suggests that the miniature has the power to condense a world into a small, self-contained image, evoking reverie and possibility. Miniatures hold within their limits the suggestion of expansiveness, a distant or ideal life imagined in reduced form. In Natalia Ginzburg's *The Dry Heart,* San Remo emerges as such a distant miniature, but one viewed not with hope but with alienated recognition.

For the protagonist, San Remo initially provokes repulsion. Its atmosphere of dreamy leisure and luxurious sociability appears too distant from her own identity, which has been stamped by her marriage to Alberto, a late middle-aged and unattractive man. In this domestic role, she is confined to the household nuances, expected to find joy in repetition and diminishment. San Remo, by contrast, represents a life both alluring and impossible: a condensed image of vitality, of "happening" social circles, of meaningful connections that might have belonged to her had she lived differently. It stands as a mirror to an alternate self, a repaired self-concept that is already beyond her grasp.

Bachelard writes that the "miniature allows us to hold vast worlds in the hollow of the hand" (149) but for the protagonist, the world San Remo condenses is one she cannot inhabit. Its bright streets and convivial air confront her with the realisation that time has passed irrevocably - that she has already surrendered to the dread of being not likeable enough, of not belonging within such spaces of vitality.

San Remo, then, is both a mirror and a foil: it reflects what might have been a more meaningful life, while also exposing the irrevocability of her alienation.

Trajectory of Poetics of Isolation in Post-war Italy

The trajectory of contemporary spatial poetics of isolation in post-war Italy has been interpreted as an unfolding, as a response to the profound psychological, social, and material dislocations that followed World War II. Italian writers of the post-war period, such as Natalia Ginzburg and others, turned to domestic and interior spaces not as sites of comfort but as symbolic architectures of estrangement. In this literary shift, the house, the room, and the

city become poetic and phenomenological zones where isolation, gendered alienation, and existential fragmentation are spatially inscribed.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, Italy was marked by rupture and reconstruction, not only materially, but morally and emotionally. The collapse of fascist idealism, the trauma of occupation, and the pressures of modernisation produced a sense of spiritual homelessness. Writers began to explore this displacement through what can be called a spatial poetics of isolation: an attention to how space - both private and social - reflects the internal condition of disconnection. The domestic sphere, once idealised as nurturing and cohesive, became a microcosm of emptiness and alienation, echoing the larger disorientation of the nation's post-war identity.

In the works of Natalia Ginzburg, for instance, the home is stripped of Bachelard's warmth and intimacy and becomes an arena of emotional stasis. Her "poetics of isolation" reworks Bachelard's Poetics of Space into a feminist counter-discourse, where Bachelard saw the house as the house of being, Ginzburg reveals it as the "house of estrangement." Her domestic interiors-kitchens, bedrooms, studies-are spaces where communication fails, desire withers, and silence dominates.

Arguably, as Italian society moved toward industrialisation and consumer modernity in the 1950s and 1960s, this spatial poetics evolved further. The modern apartment, the anonymous city street, and the impersonal workspace replaced traditional domestic and rural spaces, reinforcing feelings of detachment. The poetics of isolation thus shifts from the private and domestic to the public and urban, articulating a broader critique of modern subjectivity and capitalist rationality. In contemporary interpretations, this spatial trajectory also intersects with feminist and psychoanalytic readings, where isolation becomes not merely a symptom of modern life but a gendered condition-reflecting women's confinement within and alienation from spaces historically coded as "feminine."

Culturally, Post-war Italy valorised domesticity and feminine sacrifice as moral ideals. Women's confinement to private interiors created the ideological conditions for Ginzburg's critique. The home, celebrated as the heart of national recovery, became in her narrative the epicentre of psychic erosion. Further, social factors in mid 20th century Europe, emphasised the structural invisibility of women's labour and emotions. Ginzburg's architecture of isolation exposed

how domestic walls maintained silent hierarchies of power, making spatial analysis a lens of gender politics. Intellectual Factors: Theoretical influences from spatial phenomenology and sexual script theory reoriented domestic space from a neutral backdrop to an active participant in gender formation. This critical framework allowed isolation to be read as a socially authored spatial poetics rather than as a psychological defect.

Conclusion

In *The Dry Heart*, Natalia Ginzburg fuses the poetics of isolation with the operations of sexual scripts that quietly govern the protagonist's existence. Each domestic space-Alberto's study, the prickly bedroom, the barren house, and even San Remo as a distant miniature - embodies a psychic geography of repression. These interiors, far from being neutral, mirror the protagonist's gradual erasure within patriarchal boundaries. Ginzburg inverts Bachelard's notion of the home as a sanctuary, turning it instead into a theatre of estrangement. The sexual scripts that dictate her role as a wife transform intimacy into obligation and desire into dread, as isolation becomes both spatial and psychological. The protagonist's final act of violence thus emerges as a form of spatial revolt- a desperate assertion of agency within the suffocating architecture of domesticity.

Ginzburg's spatial and sexual poetics place *The Dry Heart* within a feminist modernist lineage that reimagines the home as a site of ideological control (Moi 23-30). In post-war Italy, domestic stability was idealised as moral virtue, yet Ginzburg exposes its quiet brutality. Her reworking of Bachelard's domestic imagery illuminates the condition of women confined by emotional, social, and architectural boundaries. Isolation, in this sense, is not an accident of temperament but a systemic design (Benjamin). Through this restrained yet devastating narrative, Ginzburg renders the ordinary house a monument of feminine endurance-and, ultimately, of rebellion.

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The Aesthetics of Generative Resistance: Solidarity, Communal World-Building, and the Radical Form of Testimonial Literature in Bell Hooks's Works

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Abstract

This paper argues for a critical reorientation in how we read testimonial literature, moving from an exclusive focus on narratives of suffering towards an analysis of the formative, world-building aesthetics of community. Drawing on Bell Hook's conceptualisation of the margin as a 'site of resistance and radical possibility,' we examine how texts forged in oppression devote significant narrative and formal energy to depicting the active creation of solidarity. The central research posits that the 'aesthetics of resistance' within these works is not merely a style of protest but an aesthetic of creation. Through the deliberate portrayal of fragile yet vital networks-their rituals, shared language, and economics of mutual care - testimonial literature perform a radical artistic act. This aesthetic practice counters the isolating logic of oppression by making visible and narratively central the processes through which the marginalised forge new grounds for collective being. By analysing the construction of this communal 'we,' this paper demonstrates how such literature transforms the marginal space from one of deprivation into a generative site for imagining and enacting alternative social orders.

Keywords: Aesthetics of Resistance, Testimonial Literature, Solidarity, World-Building, Marginality.

Introduction

The critical tradition regarding testimonial literature has historically focused on the documenting of pain. The genre's strength is often shown in how it doesn't shy away from showing the horrors of the Holocaust or the bloodshed of politics in Latin America. But this attention can unintentionally make the marginalised subject seem mostly like a victim, a body on whom power writes its cruel logic. While witnessing trauma is a crucial ethical responsibility of this literature, an exclusive emphasis on pain may obscure a deeper and equally significant narrative drive: the proactive, inventive, and communal effort of fostering community amidst a disintegrating or oppressive reality. This paper contends that a critical reorientation is necessary, suggesting that the most effective "aesthetics of resistance" in testimonial literature is not only a style of protest, but an aesthetic of production. Utilising Bell Hooks's conceptualisation of the margin as a "site of resistance" and "radical possibility" (343) along with a meticulous examination of Octavia E. Butler's influential novel *Parable of the Sower*, the study is structured on how narratives originating from the margins allocate considerable formal and narrative energy to illustrating the creation of fragile yet essential networks of solidarity. The literary portrayal of these communities and their rituals, shared languages, and economies of mutual care constitutes a radical artistic endeavour that challenges the isolating, disintegrative logic of oppression, transmuting the narrative from a mere account of suffering into a framework for construction (Butler 199).

The theoretical framework for this reading is based on the work of Bell Hooks. In her important article *Marginality as a Site of Resistance*, Hooks undertakes a pivotal recontextualization of the periphery. She adds, "I was not talking about marginality that one wants to lose or give up in order moving to the centre. I was talking about a place that one stays in, even clings to, because it helps one resist. It provides the opportunity for a radical viewpoint from which to perceive and create, to envision alternatives and new realms" (341). This idea is really important. It dismisses the idea that the margin is merely a site of absence and deprivation, instead presenting it as a distinctive epistemic perspective. From this vantage point, the shortcomings and inconsistencies of the prevailing "centre" are exposed, facilitating a critique that

remains unattainable from within the mainstream (342). Most importantly, this small area becomes a place where new social groups can form. The act of creation that Hooks talks about is not done alone; it is done with others. It is the "we" that comes from being in the same situation and refusing to accept the centre's conditions. This creative, community resistance needs its own style and a method to show the world that values working together over working alone, caring over competing, and constructing a better future over just getting by.

This approach has offered a robust perspective for re-examining the endeavour of testimonial literature. Historically, the genre has been examined through frameworks that highlight the politics of testimony and trauma. *In Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, scholars Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub have expertly examined the intricate ethical and psychological challenges of articulating unspeakable events, emphasising the representational crisis engendered by trauma (Felman and Laub). The Latin American testimonio, as articulated by John Beverley, is distinguished by its imperative to expose exploitation or oppression, frequently from the perspective of a "subaltern" individual representing a group (70-71). Although these analyses are essential, their exclusive application may irrevocably bind the marginalised voice to the moment of its violation. In contrast, a focus on world-building questions how these writings go from just saying bad things about something to actually develop something. It enquires how the narrative structure encapsulates the transition from the "I" in suffering to the "we" in creation.

Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* serves as a quintessential text for this examination. The book is a tribute to misery. It takes place in a dystopian America in the near future that has been destroyed by climate change and corporate feudalism. The main character, Lauren Oya Olamina, starts her story in a walled hamlet that is a final, weak hold on the old world, which is already dead. Butler's brilliance, on the other hand, comes from her refusal to allow this degradation to define the book. From the beginning, Lauren is not only a witness; she is also a theorist and an architect. Her hyperempathy syndrome, which makes her experience other people's suffering and pleasure, is not only a weakness; it is the medical basis for her philosophy of community. It is the sad, real-life example of how we depend on each other. Lauren's goal is not

just to stay alive as her old world burns. She also wants to gather, teach, and build. She intentionally establishes a new religion called Earthseed, which posits that "God is Change" and that humanity's fate is to "take root among the stars" (Butler 70). This intellectual endeavour is inextricably linked to the practical one: the gradual and intentional formation of a new society from the various "cast-offs" encountered on her journey north.

The aesthetics of *Parable of the Sower* are the same as the aesthetics of this world that is being built. The story is set up like Lauren's journal, which gives the reader access to the unedited process of writing. The entries are not merely a list of things that happened; they are also where the ideas behind Earthseed are written down, discussed, and improved. The text we have is the first sacred text of this new community; it is an aesthetic artefact of its birth. Butler puts a lot of effort into scenes that have nothing to do with escaping immediate danger and everything to do with the hard work of solidarity. These include arguments about leadership and rules, working together to find food and water, teaching skills, and burial and remembrance rituals. These scenarios make cooperation, trust, and a shared goal look good, which is very different from the predatory individualism of the world outside that is falling apart. The community's solidarity is depicted not merely as a pragmatic reaction to pain, but as a favourable and desirable mode of existence that had its own cultural and emotional significance. Butler's work embodies Hooks's radical marginality by utilising the narrative form to "see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds" from the remnants of the old, stating that the ultimate act of resistance is to cultivate fresh ground where none appears capable of flourishing.

The Architecture of Earthseed: From Suffering to Collective Purpose

The story of *Parable of the Sower* is a planned journey from passively living in a dying world to actively building a new one. The first part of the book is full of the claustrophobic feeling of people suffering alone and together in the walled-off area of Robledo. Lauren's extreme empathy makes her especially weak because she has to feel other people's grief as her own, which is a tangible example of the trauma that surrounds her. Her early journal writings are full of sorrow, fear, and a strong sense that something bad is going to happen soon.

But even in this area that feels like it's suffocating, there is a seed of world-building. Lauren's most important act in Robledo isn't just getting ready to leave; it's also writing down the rules of Earthseed. This is the most important change: while others stockpile guns and canned goods, Lauren stockpiles information and a way of thinking. Thomas J. Peterson, a critic, says that Lauren is a "prophet not of apocalypse, but of adaptation," whose main goal is "the systemic creation of a new social order from the fragments of the old" (45).

The story moves from showing how one person suffers to establishing a world together when Lauren has to go on the road. The most important scene is after her house is destroyed and she meets Zahra Moss and Harry Balter. This is not a random group; it is the deliberate creation of a new social entity. Lauren quickly sets up other structures, going from a survivalist way of thinking to a communitarian one. She gives away her food, her expertise of the north, and most importantly, her way of thinking. A significant sequence shows how the group makes its first decision together after meeting the famished couple, Nora and Greg. Lauren doesn't tell the group what to talk about; instead, they all argue about it, which sets up a kind of representative system of encouragement and worth. They intentionally choose to share their scarce resources, embodying the Earthseed premise that "God is Change," and that they must "shape God" towards compassion and mutual aid, thus establishing a novel value system grounded in shared humanity rather than accumulated scarcity (Butler 147). This intentional formulation of a substitute social contract signifies a decisive transition in narrative focus from their current plight to their constructive endeavours.

Butler artistically supports this communal turn through the novel's structure and changing language. The journal structure is essentially personal, but its content progressively records the growth of a community voice. The strategic use of pronouns is very interesting. The early analyses are mostly on "I" and "they," which shows how alone Lauren feels in Robledo. As her community pulls together, the word "we" becomes more common and important. This "we" does not obliterate individual identities but denotes a collaborative endeavour. Susan Knabe, a feminist scholar, writes about community in dystopian fiction. She says, "Butler uses the first-person plural not as a homogenising force, but as a marker of a voluntarily constituted collective, a 'us' that is constantly being defined through shared action and discourse" (112).

This aesthetic of collective action is further enhanced by the integration of oral storytelling and communal rituals. The Earthseed verses serve as a binding ceremony, recited and analysed by the gathering. They are not fixed texts; they are living records that people argue about around campfires, turning into a common intellectual and spiritual undertaking. Butler also uses narrative space to show instances where characters like Bankole and Travis share their abilities and past experiences, which makes a shared store of information. Another strong aesthetic choice is the ritual of burying the deceased they find on the road, which Lauren insists on. It is an act that gives people back their dignity in a world that has taken it away. Doing it collectively strengthens the group's common morals. These moments are not random; they are the building blocks of community, revealing how common language, ritual, and memory create a sense of belonging.

Contrast with the Center: Cooperation vs. Predatory Individualism

In Butler's dystopia, the dominant centre is a hyper-capitalist, quasi-feudal society that has turned into predatory individualism. The Earthseed community is defined in direct opposition to these beliefs. The world outside of Lauren's group is quite competitive when it comes to getting resources. The "paints" addicted arsonists who enjoy destroying things are a perfect example of this, as are the widespread slavery and cannibalism. This centre runs on the idea of taking and using things, where people are either resources or prey. The marginal community of Earthseed, on the other hand, makes cooperation and radical interdependence beautiful. They don't have to beat others to survive; they just have to create trust and share their different skills. Lauren is the thinker and leader, Zahra is the practical survivor, Harry is the reluctant follower at first, Bankole is the healer with a vision of a safe haven, Travis and Natividad are the protectors and future parents. Each person adds a distinct skill that makes the group stronger. This structure is similar to what ecological philosopher Joanna Macy terms a "relational self" (67). She says that this is an identity that is not just a distinct ego, but a part of a network of reciprocal dependency. The community's strength lies in its variety and dedication to a common future, serving as a direct counter to the unifying and isolating influence of the failing

centre. Their trip north isn't just a shift to a different place; it's also a move away from the essential ideals of a civilisation that has failed and towards the edge, where new worlds can be imagined.

Solidarity vs. Suffering: The Positive Weight of the "We"

One of the most important things Butler's work does is balance misery and solidarity. This made sure that the community is not just a dismal necessity, but a good and desirable goal in and of itself. The pain is always there and very real; violence, hunger, and loss are always threatening the group. But the emotional core of the story and its most hopeful parts come directly from the making of the "we." The solidarity is not merely a reaction to pain; it becomes a source of purpose, identity, and even happiness on its own. This is clear in scenarios that don't help people survive in a practical way but are very important to their culture. The shared meals, the teaching of Earthseed lyrics to the children, the embryonic romantic relationships between members, and the group dream of obtaining Bankole's land, are moments of future-oriented hope and present-tense intimacy. The book makes us think this is better by comparing how Lauren feels when she is alone with her hyperempathic anguish to how she feels when she is among her group. Even though she still feels the anguish of others, it is lessened by the realness of shared concern and a common goal. Matthew Mullins, a scholar, says, "*In Parable of the Sower*, resilience is not found in the hardened individual, but in the flexible, adaptive collective. The 'good life' is reinterpreted not as a return to comfort and stability, but as the freedom to construct meaning collaboratively amidst constant change" (203). The pain gives the story its backdrop, but the solidarity gives it its meaning, turning it from a story of survival into a monument to how humans can create even in the most barren of environments.

Conclusion

Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* is a great example of how to use art as a form of resistance and as a way to create. It follows the story from the beleaguered enclave of Robledo to the new community of Earthseed. This paper contends that the novel's significant strength resides not in its apocalyptic portrayal of pain, but in its careful literary formulation of an alternative

sociality developed in the periphery. Through the purposeful development of Earthseed's philosophical and practical frameworks, the strategic use of a collective voice, and the stark contrast made between cooperative interdependence and a predatory center, Butler advances beyond testifying as mere witness. She re-frames the margin, in line with Bell Hooks's vision, as a place where establishing community is both a radical artistic and political act. Lauren Olamina and her followers' path shows that real resistance to a world that is falling apart and oppressive is not just about being against it; it is also about building it. Building new systems of value, knowledge, and mutual care from the ground up is hard labour that takes time and effort. Angela Davis, a philosopher and activist, famously said, "You have to act as if it were possible to radically change the world" (182). This was in reference to the need for a radical community. And you have to do it all the time. Butler's book is a literary version of this idea. The Earthseed society doesn't merely react to the instability in the world; they actively create a new one based on the idea that "God is Change." This is not a passive spirituality; it is a call to action that is focused and collaborative. In the end, the world-building work in *Parable of the Sower* is an important counterpoint to stories that only show the downtrodden via their trauma. Butler makes sure that the reader perceives the community not as a gloomy covenant for existence, but as a better way to be human by balancing the unavoidable fact of pain with the positive emotional and cultural weight of solidarity. The shared rituals, the pooled knowledge, and the communal dream of Acorn Farm are not merely means to an end; they are the end itself as a life of meaning built in relation to others. This corresponds with Kevin Quashie's concept of the "quiet" of inner life that transcends resistance, embodying a faculty for "wonder, imagination, and desire" that is fundamental to existence (6). Earthseed converts this intrinsic potential into an outward, communal initiative.

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Reading Strindberg's *Miss Julie* through Michel de Certeau: Strategy, Tactic, and the Collapse of Resistance

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Abstract

This paper reads August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* through the theoretical framework of strategy and tactic proposed by Michel de Certeau, supported by Foucault's ideas of power, Althusser's ideological state apparatuses, Gramsci's hegemony, and James C. Scott's concept of hidden transcripts. The study shows how the Count's household represents strategic power, while Jean, Julie, and Kristin demonstrate different ways of responding to that power through tactics, belief, resistance, or submission. The paper explains how social class, gender expectations, upbringing, religion, and psychological conflict shape the characters' choices. Special attention is given to Julie's upbringing under contradictory parents, Jean's opportunistic manipulation, Kristin's moral stability, and the shifting power dynamics expressed through moments such as sex in Jean's room, the dance scene, the handkerchief incident, and Julie's final moments before suicide. The paper argues that *Miss Julie* is not simply a tragedy of passion but a drama of everyday resistance, where tactics fail against deeply rooted strategies, leading to Julie's downfall.

Keywords: Strategy, Tactic, Ideology, Hidden Transcripts, Resistance, Hegemony, Ideological State Apparatuses

1. Introduction

1.1 The Play and the Playwright

August Strindberg (1849–1912) is one of modern drama's most radical innovators, who merged naturalism with symbolic, psychological, and proto-expressionist elements. He foregrounds social tensions including class, gender, sexuality, and the metaphysics of will in tightly staged domestic dramas where characters' internal tumult becomes external action.

August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1888) is one of the most significant plays of modern drama. Set over a single Midsummer night in the kitchen of a Swedish Count's house, the play follows the dangerous interaction between Miss Julie, the Count's daughter; Jean, the valet; and Kristin, the cook. Strindberg uses a naturalistic style to show how class, gender, upbringing, and desire collide in a confined space. Although the play seems simple in structure, it contains complex ideas about authority, rebellion, power, and human psychology. The night gives the illusion of freedom, but the characters remain trapped within the larger system that governs their lives. The play ends tragically. The ideas of escape collapse under the pressure of shame, strategic calculation, and the social machinery of honour and discipline.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

To understand the deeper meanings of the play, this paper uses the theoretical distinction between strategy and tactic, introduced by the French theorist Michel de Certeau in his seminal work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). De Certeau was the first to talk about everyday life practices as acts of resistance. In its denotative context, 'strategies' are planned ways of operation to achieve certain ends, while 'tactics' are the particular methods one uses to meet the desired goal. According to De Certeau, strategies belong to institutions or powerful figures who control space, rules, and order, while tactics belong to weaker individuals who must make quick, temporary decisions inside someone else's system. A strategy is secure and long-lasting; a tactic is fragile and dependent on opportunity. He defines strategies as:

> Strategies are actions which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power (the property of a proper), elaborate theoretical places (systems and totalising discourses) capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed. (Certeau 38)

On the other hand he concludes tactics as:

> Tactics are procedures that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time —to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favourable situation, to the

> rapidity of the movements that change the organisation of a space…. (Certeau 38)

In simple words, Certeau states that 'strategy' is preplanned, fixed, and determinate, which takes place at a proper place and in an appropriate manner, whereas he asserts that 'tactic' is not fixed or localised. It adjusts itself anywhere. It is subject to time and not to space. It is a product of an opportunity and can be gathered in diversified situations (Certeau xix). This concept helps us understand the behaviour of the characters in *Miss Julie*, especially the difference between the permanent authority of the Count through strategy and the temporary rebellion of Julie and Jean through tactics.

The theoretical background becomes stronger when we connect de Certeau to Foucault's idea that "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (93) and shapes people through routines, discipline, and surveillance. Foucault explains that where power exists, resistance also appears, but resistance cannot destroy power because it is part of the same system. In Foucault's words, power pervades everywhere in social networks and "points of resistance" appear everywhere within these networks of power relations (Stoddart 205). Foucault asserts that the relationship between power and resistance is not merely a dichotomy but a dynamic and shifting process. As he observes, "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (96). In other words, resistance does not exist outside power; it operates within the same network of force relations. Thus, if one provokes the other, each is equally shaped and influenced by the other. This idea helps explain why Julie and Jean resist the Count's authority yet never manage to escape it.

Louis Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) also helps us unfold a different perspective of *Miss Julie*. He claims that ideology is an important factor that shapes the thinking of the people of any society. It operates quite subtly through these ideological state apparatuses. Althusser shows how institutions like religion, family, school, and tradition silently teach people how to behave. He distinguishes Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs); police, judiciary, military from Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs); education, religion, family, media. The basic difference is that "the Repressive State

Apparatus functions 'by violence' whereas the Ideological State Apparatus functions 'by ideology'" (Althusser 16). ISAs perform the everyday work of making domination appear natural by embedding a set of beliefs and rituals into social life. Ideology is thus materially realised through repetitive practices and institutional forms. These institutions shape the beliefs of characters like Kristin, who thinks faith and obedience are the correct ways to live. Through Althusser's lens, Kristin becomes a support for the Count's authority even when he is not physically present.

In connection with this, Gramsci's theory of hegemony also helps explain why many characters accept their position without force. Gramsci describes hegemony as "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group…" (145). Therefore, it is a form of power that depends upon an individual's willing participation rather than a fearful submission to punishment and torture. In addition, Gramsci asserts that hegemony has a material dimension that does not work on a floating system of ideas; instead, it is produced out of the social action of everyday life (Stoddart 201). Action is significant in hegemony also. In the play, the Count does not need to punish or use violence over Jean or Kristin, because they already believe in the system. Julie, however, grows up with conflicting beliefs and therefore feels torn between domination and rebellion.

James C. Scott's concept of hidden transcripts adds another layer of interpretation. Scott defines hidden transcripts as the unspoken critiques, narratives, and acts of resistance developed by subordinate groups. He uses the term "hidden transcript" to characterise discourse that takes place "offstage," beyond the direct observation of powerholders (4). Jean's stories, secret desires, and subtle acts of imitation exemplify this hidden form of resistance.

1.3 Aim and Scope of the Study

In this paper, the focus will be on strategy and tactics as proposed by de Certeau. The Count represents strategy, as he controls space, class, and social expectations. Jean and Julie attempt tactics; small acts of rebellion or opportunity, but their tactics ultimately fail because the system is too strong. Kristine represents the ideological power that supports the strategy. By analysing

important moments in the play, such as Julie's childhood, Jean's manipulation of Julie, the dance scene, sexual encounter in Jean's room, Jean's and Julie's dreams, symbolic elements, and Julie's final suicide, this paper will show how Strindberg dramatises everyday resistance while simultaneously exploring concepts like Ideological State Apparatuses, hegemony, and hidden transcripts, as given by different theorists.

2. Methodology

This is a theoretical and close-reading study. The theories and concepts discussed above are applied to the dramatic actions of the play. There is a symbolic and psychological interpretation of the dialogues. The primary text is August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1888). Secondary theoretical sources include Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Michel Foucault's essays on power, Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971), Antonio Gramsci's *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971), and James C. Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990).

3. Analysis

Every action in the play is influenced by tactics, strategies, and power. It becomes crucial to examine the space in which every action takes place in order to understand how these three operate in the play. Every movement within this space reveals how power is constantly shifting. The space itself becomes a strategic instrument. Strindberg employs the kitchen not merely as a backdrop but as a mechanism to restrict freedom and regulate behaviour. The kitchen, which is the servants' domain, serves as the setting for almost the entire play. The space is not neutral; rather, it becomes a powerful symbol of control and illustrates how a dominant system governs its inhabitants. According to de Certeau, strategies belong to those who control space. The kitchen is one such strategic site within the Count's household. It is hierarchical, regulated, and rigidly structured. Kristine embodies the strict discipline expected of the servants. She continues cooking calmly even when unusual events unfold. She mumbles incoherently in her sleep, "His Lordship's boots are brushed—put on the coffee—right away, right away, right…" (Strindberg 172). Her consistent

behaviour demonstrates how deeply the system has moulded her consciousness. She just lives inside it; she doesn't fight against it. Jean, too, recognises the importance of this confined space. He knows that, as a servant, the kitchen belongs to his class. Julie's presence, therefore, becomes a tactical intrusion. By entering the kitchen, she crosses into a space that is not intended for her. Julie comes into the kitchen out of loneliness; however, because the kitchen functions within the Count's strategic order, she inadvertently enters a system that eventually traps her.

Kristine's actions further highlight the stability of strategy and produce a striking contrast. She demonstrates her acceptance of the social hierarchy when she lets Jean dance with Julie and remarks, "Go on, you, and be grateful for the honour" (Strindberg 166). She doesn't feel envious because she believes that Jean will behave according to his role as a servant. Her personal relationship with Jean matters less to her than his loyalty to the Count and his daughter. This illustrates hegemony as defined by Gramsci: Kristine accepts her subordinate position not through force, but because she perceives the system as natural.

Having examined how space conditions behaviour, it is now necessary to explore Julie's inner world and the psychological forces that drive her actions. The roots of her tragedy lie in her upbringing. The psychological conflict that destroys her emerges from the contradictory values she inherited from her parents. This conflict intensifies when we bring into consideration the role of her father in her life. The Count represents stern aristocratic discipline and emotional coldness. Although he never appears on stage, his authority affects the entire household. Julie's fear becomes visible when, upon hearing the sound of the bell, she instantly "jumps to her feet" (Strindberg 215). This moment reveals how deeply paternal authority has been internalised within her psyche. Julie yearns for freedom yet remains terrified of punishment. The combination of a rebellious mother and a tyrannical father leaves her without a stable sense of identity. She always oscillates between the two. This confusion of identity helps to explain why she rebels impulsively at one moment and collapses instantly the next.

While Julie's behaviour is shaped by confusion and inner conflict, Jean's actions are governed by calculation and opportunity. His conduct indicates how the powerless use language, performance, and storytelling as tactical tools

when negotiating with authority and the powerful. Jean narrates a melodramatic story of having seen Julie in the garden as a child, recounting how he was "bursting through the raspberry bushes" (Strindberg 178) simply to catch a glimpse of her. He later admits that the story was fabricated: "It was just talk… I read it in the paper once…" (Strindberg 189). This fabricated story functions as a tactical device (narrative)—precisely the kind of improvisation that de Certeau associates with those lacking institutional power. Jean uses the story in order to impress Julie, gain her sympathy, and shift the emotional balance in his favour. The story makes Julie feel wanted and important and she relinquishes emotional control. When Jean later reveals that the story is fictitious, it demonstrates how tactics work; they are an affair of seizing opportunities rather than an issue of enduring truth. Jean's tactics continue through the way he uses language. He repeatedly utters French phrases, such as "Vous voulez plaisanter, madame!" and "Très jolie!" (Strindberg 169) to impress Julie. These phrases make him seem more educated and refined than an ordinary servant. He tries to exceed his social position. Julie is drawn to this performance because French is closely associated with aristocratic culture. Jean's use of French becomes a tactical manoeuvre—a small yet effective tool he uses to reduce the class divide and social gap between them. Julie even admits that she admires the way he speaks French. In reality, Jean knows only a few phrases, but he deploys them strategically to elevate his status. This aligns with James Scott's concept of hidden transcripts, where subordinates subtly imitate elite behaviour as a form of resistance and self-advancement. In this case, Jean, a servant, imitates the behaviour of the master class as a quiet resistance.

These tactical performances culminate in the most explosive moment of the play: the transgression of class boundaries through intimacy. Here, desire becomes the force that exposes the limits of tactics. The turning point of the play comes when Julie follows Jean to his room, and they have physical intercourse. Although the act is not shown on stage, it is strongly implied. Upon their return, Julie cries, "I'm falling! I'm falling!" (Strindberg 187). Jean responds, "Fall as far as me, and I'll lift you up again" (Strindberg 187). This moment violates every established order—class, morality, obedience, and the authority of the Count. From a theoretical perspective, this scene demonstrates the risk of tactics without strategies. Julie's decision is impulsive and driven by emotion

and desire, whereas Jean's response is calculated and almost manipulative. Immediately after the intercourse, Jean gains confidence and begins to blame Julie. He begins to direct commands at her and asserts control. For a while, the social barriers break down, and Jean gains psychological dominance over Julie. As Foucault argues, these acts of transgression do not destroy power; instead, they expose the internal mechanics of power. Julie realises that her class privilege can no longer protect her, while Jean discovers that he can intimidate her.

This reversal becomes evident as Julie's emotional strength collapses. After their sexual encounter, the roles of master and servant are fully inverted. Julie becomes fearful, ashamed, and dependent. She cries, "I detest you as I do rats, but I can't run away from you" (Strindberg 192). Jean replies authoritatively, "Run away with me" (Strindberg 192). This rapid inversion of roles exposes how swiftly power shifts when emotional boundaries dissolve. Whereas earlier Julie had commanded Jean to dance, fetch wine, etc., she is now in a state of confusion and seeks his guidance. She hates him, but at the same time, she is dependent on him. On the other hand, Jean uses her shame as a tactic, controlling her thoughts, her expressions, and even her decisions.

This transgression of boundaries is also emphasised through the physical contact that Julie intentionally wants to make with Jean before their sexual encounter. The first crucial moment occurs when Julie touches Jean's sleeve and comments on his muscles: "a big strong fellow like you!… with arms like that" (Strindberg 175). This gesture clearly shows the crossing of the class boundaries. Simultaneously, it reveals both Julie's desire for dominance and her profound loneliness. Her sexuality becomes a tactic to gain intimacy in an isolating world in a world that intensifies her loneliness. Jean initially reacts carefully and warns her of the consequences: "Don't you know it's dangerous to play with fire?" (Strindberg 175). Julie's illusion of power and control becomes evident when she ignores Jean's repeated warnings. Jean tells her repeatedly that getting close to him is perilous. Julie pretends not to understand because the feeling of being superior pleases her. Here, she tries to use her class status as a tactic. She assumes she is safe and untouchable as the Count's daughter. But she is wrong. Julie underestimates Jean's ambition and overestimates her own emotional strength, believing that her status as the Count's daughter renders her untouchable. Strindberg uses this moment to

show that tactics collapse when they ignore real structures of power. Jean, who was reluctant, soon uses this moment as a means to gain control over her. He assumes Julie as an escape from his class. He wins the opportunity to dominate her by playing tactics. This reflects Foucault's view of power as fluid and relational; constantly shifting and always flowing. Julie appears dominant for some time, yet this moment gives Jean a chance to take advantage of her vulnerability. This small tactical mistake marks the beginning of her downfall.

As the emotional struggle intensifies, Strindberg introduces symbolic elements that reveal the characters' deepest fears and desires. These symbols also reinforce the claustrophobia created by a society that constantly surveils, judges, and limits individual freedom. One such symbol in the play is the servants' folk chorus. The servants outside sing a mocking song about Julie. They represent the collective voice of the society and remind her that her actions cannot remain hidden. She may hold herself to be rich, respectable, and superior, but the song reveals her vulnerability. It functions as a social judgment, signalling that she has stepped over the class boundaries and must face the consequences. In naturalistic drama, the chorus often symbolises social pressure. Here, the chorus demonstrates how collective power overwhelms individual defiance. "There came two women from out the wood……But to another I'll be true….." (Strindberg 181-82). The other symbolic element is conveyed through the dreams. Both Jean and Julie recount their dreams that symbolise their desires and anxieties. Julie dreams of "falling from a great height" (Strindberg 174). This is symbolic of Julie's insecurity in a world where she stands above others yet feels unstable. She feels trapped by class, gender, and upbringing. Jean dreams of climbing a towering tree "so tall that he could see the whole world" (Strindberg 174). It symbolises his ambition, hope, determination, and belief in social mobility. Their dreams move in opposite directions—Julie dreams of falling downwards while Jean dreams of climbing upwards. The stated dreams clearly mirror their positions in class hierarchy and their respective emotional states. Both use tactics to escape. The caged bird Julie keeps symbolises her own confinement. When Jean kills it and declares, "I'll soon wring its neck" (Strindberg 206), the act foreshadows Julie's fate as an omen for darkness. She instantly grasps its meaning and weeps, "Kill me too! Kill me!" (Strindberg

207). These symbols and dreams function as emotional mirrors, revealing the realities of the inner worlds of the characters.

All preceding events culminate in the disintegration of Julie's emotional and social world. The Count's return, felt only through his presence rather than his body, brings strategy back into full control and obliterates the fragile tactics employed by both Julie and Jean. According to de Certeau, Julie's actions throughout the play represent tactics: fleeting, minor, and transient efforts to achieve liberation within a place prey to controlled space. After the sexual encounter, Jean's behaviour shifts toward strategy. He gains stability through knowledge, emotional leverage, and proximity to institutional authority. Julie's identity disintegrates because her rebellion had no solid foundation. This collapse becomes clear through Julie's growing dependence on Jean. She begins to ask him for help because she can't bring herself to do anything and is unable to think of anything (Strindberg 215). This moment is psychologically significant. It shows that Julie's upbringing left her emotionally unprepared for crises. Her mother taught her to hate men; her father taught her strict obedience to authority. Jean becomes a substitute for both; someone she depends on, fears, and resents at the same time. She even asks Jean to command her and save her from her shame. Here, Foucault's idea becomes apparent that power shapes the mind. Julie cannot make independent choices because she was never taught to do so. Jean becomes her temporary master, and she behaves like a servant.

Julie makes one final tactical attempt by proposing a plan to escape with Jean. This tactic fails even before it begins. Jean agrees with her initially, but his plans are illogical, irrational, and full of dreams; he thinks of setting up a hotel with Julie's stolen cash. The longer they discuss, the more he becomes apprehensive, saying, "I'd like to … but I dare not" (Strindberg 184). This plan is a failed tactic because Julie has no money of her own, Jean is afraid of the Count's power, they lack a proper plan, and the shame of being judged by society that would ruin them.

This failure is ideological as well as practical. The concept of hegemony, as described by Gramsci, explains the failure. Jean and Julie have the ideologies of their class within them. Julie still feels obligated to her father. Jean still has the fear of losing his job, even when they want to escape physically, their minds are

still imprisoned within the social structure. This ideological trap is revealed in the most striking scene of the play. The sound of the Count's bell changes everything suddenly. Jean, who had been behaving like a master a short while ago, becomes a servant again. He declares, "I do not know why…. This confounded lackey is sitting on my back" (Strindberg 216). Julie, too, slides back into her submissive position. This is a demonstration that power is structural, not personal, as argued by Foucault. Jean might have been dominating Julie when she was alone with him, but the presence of the Count, even on the telephone, brings back the entire order.

Julie's final surrender marks the complete collapse of her rebellion. Her last plea—"Order me!" (Strindberg 215)—signals her complete psychological destruction as a human being. She is going towards death because she is afraid of her father. She knows that society will judge her all her life. She thinks that her transgression is unpardonable, and she is emotionally unstable. Jean responds coldly, "Go now!" (Strindberg 216). She obeys without hesitation. This moment confirms the total failure of the rebellion. As de Certeau suggests, when tactics fail, the system achieves absolute victory. In the end, Julie's suicide is not merely a personal tragedy but a testament to how society crushes a woman who attempts to transcend prescribed limits.

4. Conclusion

When read through Michel de Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactic, the play becomes a map of how individuals try to survive within rigid social structures, how they use small opportunities for freedom, and how those opportunities fail when confronted with strong strategic power.

The Count symbolises strategy in the aristocratic system: he controls space, rules, morality, and identity even when he is physically absent. His boots, his bell, and the controlled environment of the kitchen relentlessly remind other characters of his presence. His power is stable because it is bolstered by deeper ideological forces, which Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatuses; religion, class training, and social expectations. Kristine becomes the representative of these apparatuses. Her calm obedience, her religious beliefs, and her commitment to duty maintain the Count's authority. She believes in the system and therefore protects it. In Gramsci's words, she accepts hegemony; the idea

that people agree to their own lower position because they believe it is natural rather than imposed.

Against this strong strategic frame, Jean and Julie try to employ tactics. A tactic, according to de Certeau, is an activity of short duration that uses the instant opportunities but doesn't appropriate space or strategy. Julie enters the kitchen, dances with the servants, touches Jean's arm, and behaves freely for a short time. Such actions show energy and rebellion, but they are brief. They neither break the structure nor change any rule. Her impulsive decision to go into Jean's room is also a tactic; emotional, sudden, and without any plan. These tactics feel powerful while they happen, but they leave Julie vulnerable to shame and social judgement. She rebels the way her mother taught her, but she obeys the way her father trained her. This inner conflict ultimately destroys her.

Jean also uses tactics. His use of French, his fabricated childhood narrative about Julie viewed in the garden, his imitation of the aristocratic manners, his attempts to control Julie after their sexual encounter are all examples of how a weaker party employs small tools to gain advantage of the fleeting opportunities. James C. Scott's notion of hidden transcripts explains Jean's behavior. He mimics the aristocrats behind their backs, quietly mocks them, and secretly dreams of rising above them. But the moment of real rebellion, when Julie asks him to run away, he cannot act. His fear of the Count, his insecurity, and his internalised respect for hierarchy show that he, too, is trapped. Jean is clever, but tactics can never defeat strategy.

The symbols used in the play emphasise this theme. Julie's dream of falling, while Jean's dream of climbing, indicates that they are destined for opposite trajectories. The bird inside Julie's cage symbolises Julie's own life, which is locked inside. The killing of the bird by Jean is a symbol which foreshadows Julie's fate, that is, her death. The servant's chorus is a symbol of the collective voice of society, which is loud, biased, and harsh.

The ringing of the Count's bell marks the collapse of the tactics and with it the collapse of the resistance. Jean, who briefly acted as a master, is scared once again. Julie, who thought of getting freedom with tactics, is left completely powerless. In this way, Foucault's idea becomes evident that power operates not only on the body but also on the mind. Jean and Julie return to their original position, not because they are forced, but because the system resides within

them. Julie's final plea for Jean to "command" her indicates that she has lost control of her individuality. She chooses death, as she has no way out of the norms that she has violated. She moves towards death, not out of desire, but because she perceives no alternative.

In this way, Strindberg's play is a great instance of how everyday resistance is not sufficient against strong societal structures. Julie's tactics cannot develop into strategies because she lacks a strong identity, support, and power. Jean's tactics are sufficient for a short while, but he is also constrained by his class. Kristine remains unchanged because she entirely believes in the system. The Count's strategy, by contrast, remains unchallenged from beginning to end.

Thus, Miss Julie is a tragic example of how De Certeau's notion works: tactics produce instances of freedom, but strategies condition the world. Julie's rebellion shines brightly for a limited time, but the dawn returns the system, along with Julie's destruction. Strindberg ultimately suggests that in a society which is founded on very rigid norms related to class, those who solely rely on tactics to escape them may be crushed, rather than liberated.

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The Dynamics of Child-Adult Power Relationship in Roald Dahl's *Matilda*

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Abstract

This paper examines Roald Dahl's *Matilda* as a powerful site of contestation between adult authority and child agency, arguing that Dahl formulates an alternative discourse that subverts the entrenched hierarchy of children's literature. Through narrative voice, grotesque characterisation, carnivalesque humour, and strategic naming, Dahl exposes the ideological nature of adult dominance while offering his child protagonists an empowered position. The study highlights how sympathy is elicited for Matilda through the narrator's emphasis on her vulnerability and brilliance, while adult figures such as the Wormwoods and Miss Trunchbull are rendered grotesque to undermine their legitimacy. Yet Dahl's vision is complicated by the paradox of Matilda's precocity: though framed as a child, her extraordinary intelligence and moral maturity place her in an adult subject position, rendering her triumphs dependent on adult-like qualities. This paper, therefore, argues that *Matilda* both challenges and inadvertently reinforces the child–adult dichotomy it seeks to dismantle, revealing the complexities of power, resistance, and identity within children's literature.

Keywords: Child–adult power dynamics, Agency, Authority, Subversion, Grotesque humour.

Introduction:

Children's literature is structured by an inherent asymmetry of power, as it is overwhelmingly produced by adults for children, with adult authority shaping both representation and reception. Perry Nodelman rightly argues, "Children's literature is literature that claims to be devoid of adult content that nevertheless lurks within" (341). The very notions of "child" and "childhood" function as ideological constructs through which adult society defines children as dependent, incomplete, and in need of guidance. Consequently, children's literature often

naturalises adult dominance while presenting itself as benign, instructive, or entertaining. Nicola Ansell insightfully observes that "the notion that the children should be 'seen and not heard' illustrates the adult society's disregard for children's opinions. Children are expected to be passive recipients of adult care and tuition, rather than agents in their own lives, let alone society" (12). This imbalance is most evident in the dynamics between adult authority figures and child protagonists, where children are positioned as objects of discipline rather than as agents of meaning. Adult voices frequently regulate what may be spoken, thought, or imagined, reinforcing a cultural logic in which children are expected to be compliant and silent. Andrew Melrose argues, "But importantly, these [child-adult power relationships] can also be seen in the culture adults produce for children, such as books and their written worlds, toys, television shows, etc., all of which, in a normative sense, are created by those in power for the powerless" (1). Power thus operates not only through overt coercion but also through narrative structures that legitimise adult knowledge and marginalise child resistance. Representation itself becomes a mechanism of control, as adult-authored texts determine the boundaries of acceptable childhood behaviour and agency.

Roald Dahl's *Matilda* intervenes forcefully in this tradition by foregrounding the violence—psychological, emotional, and institutional—embedded in adult authority. The novel exposes the arbitrariness and cruelty of adult power as embodied by figures such as the Wormwoods and Miss Trunchbull, whose authority is based not on moral or intellectual superiority but on brute force and social position. In contrast, Matilda's exceptional intellect and ethical clarity destabilise the assumed child–adult hierarchy, reversing conventional power relations. By granting the child protagonist narrative agency and legitimising her resistance to unjust authority, *Matilda* critiques the ideological foundations of adult dominance and reimagines childhood as a site of autonomy, intelligence, and subversive potential rather than passive dependence.

Dahl and Children's Literature:

Against the dominant ideological assumptions of children's literature that privilege adult authority, Roald Dahl formulates a counter-discourse that

questions this hierarchy and foregrounds children's autonomy and agency. In many of his works, child protagonists confront neglect, coercion, or misuse of authority by adults, a pattern that accounts for Dahl's popularity among child readers. His narratives consistently align with the child's perspective in situations of conflict with adult power. Dahl's own reflections on childhood psychology illuminate this narrative stance. In an interview, he observes that children between seven and nine are "only semi-civilized" and often perceive adults—particularly parents and teachers—as adversarial figures engaged in the process of disciplining and socialising them (qtd. in West's *Roald Dahl* 74–75). Rather than suppressing this perception, Dahl incorporates it into his fiction. While this has led critics such as Jonathan Culley and Sharon E. Royer to accuse Dahl of vulgarity, excessive violence, or biased portrayals of adults, such criticism overlooks the fact that Dahl draws attention to forms of authority and behaviour that children's literature often sanitises or ignores.

In *Matilda*, Dahl develops this counter-discourse through narrative voice, exaggerated characterisation, and symbolic naming practices. Adult figures such as Miss Trunchbull are rendered grotesque, both physically and psychologically, while authority is depicted as arbitrary and oppressive rather than inherently benevolent. However, Dahl's portrayal of adulthood is not uniformly negative. Characters such as Miss Honey represent alternative, nurturing forms of authority, suggesting that the novel critiques misuse of power rather than adulthood per se. At the same time, Dahl complicates the child–adult binary through Matilda herself. She is not a conventionally realistic child but an exceptionally precocious one, intellectually and emotionally resembling an adult. This blurring of categories problematizes the novel's resistance narrative, as Matilda's ability to challenge authority depends on her possessing adult-like rationality and self-control. Consequently, identities of "child" and "adult" in the novel remain fluid and interchangeable, with each occasionally appropriating the traits of the other.

Dahl's scepticism towards adult authority can be traced to his own childhood experiences, particularly his time at Repton School, where corporal punishment and authoritarian discipline prevailed, as described in *Boy*. The oppressive headmaster of Repton is widely seen as a model for Miss Trunchbull. In response to such figures, Dahl frequently equips his child protagonists with

supportive mentors who exist outside conventional parental structures. In *Matilda*, this role is fulfilled by Miss Honey, with whom Matilda forms an affective bond independent of parental control. By the novel's conclusion, Matilda's decision to live with Miss Honey signals a reconfiguration of family and authority, privileging care, understanding, and mutual respect over biological or institutional power.

Subverting Adult Authority: The Child's Voice and Emotional Affinity in *Matilda*

In *Matilda* Dahl dexterously employs the narrative voice to create emotional affinity among the readers with the child protagonists and other children in the novel. The narrator, for example, frequently focuses on Matilda's young age and her diminutive size. She is described as "tiny" (6) and "small" (7) and she "toddles' instead of being able to walk. When Matilda reads a "a grown-up" book "sitting in the big armchair" in the library, "it was necessary to rest it on the lap, because it was too heavy for her to hold up" (9) and while she sat, since she was too small, her feet touched nowhere in the floor. Again, as her parents were indifferent enough to leave her alone in the home, she needed to prepare a cup of hot chocolate all by herself standing on a box as she "was not quite tall enough to reach things around the kitchen" (15). In emphasising Matilda's young age and her small size, the narrator at once elicits an endearing emotional response for the child. The emotional response of admiration intensifies when the readers come to accost the fact that in spite of being so small and young, she is exceptionally brilliant with a "nimble mind" that is amazingly "quick to learn" (4). The narrator spontaneously evokes compassion for Matilda through his empathizing narration that highlights Matilda's pitiful plight. When the librarian Mrs. Phelps asks Matilda whether her mother walks her to the library, Matilda, a "little sadly", answers, "she doesn't really care what I do" (10). Matilda's repulsive experience about how she is treated by her parents is made even clearer when the narrator points out that "she longed for her parents to be good and loving and understanding and honourable and intelligent (43).

Another way the narrative voice contributes to the negative perception of the evil adults is by defining them through unfavourable, ridiculous physical

attributes and by making unpalatable comments about them. Mr Wormwood, for example, is defined as "small ratty looking man whose front teeth stuck out underneath a thin ratty moustache" (16) and "whose manner of talking was never delicate" (17). Mrs Wormwood is portrayed as "a large woman whose hair was dyed platinum blonde", which had "mousy brown bits growing out from the roots" (21). Miss Trunchbull, the fierce headmistress of Matilda's school, the "boss, the commander", is introduced by the narrator as "a gigantic holy terror, a fierce tyrannical monster who frightened the life out of the pupils and the teachers alike" (60-61). Again, to match her insensible, formidable interior, she is also portrayed as having a formidable, masculine exterior. The narrator therefore comments: "She has once been a famous athlete, and even now the muscles were still clearly in evidence. You could see them in the bull-neck, in the big shoulders…in the powerful legs" (66). That Dahl wants his readers to share the feelings of oneness with his child protagonist becomes evident time and again, the way he uses his narrator to underscore and contrast the innocent powerlessness of the children with the conceived power of the adults. The narrator brings the readers into the favour of the five-year old protagonist when he comments, "You must remember that she was still hardly five years old and it is not easy for somebody as small as that to score points against an all-powerful grown-up" (23) or when he emphasizes that "it is bad enough when parents treat ordinary children as though they were scabs, but it becomes worse when the child in question is extra-ordinary" (4).

Power, Authority and Parental Oppression:

Through this commentary, the narrator immediately evokes repellent feelings towards the discouraging and depreciating parents in general and Matilda's parents in particular as the readers come to know later that despite being brilliant and sensitive, Matilda's parents see their daughters as a "scab" and often castigate and suppress her by calling her "ignorant little twit" or "too stupid" (16). If, according to French and Raven, 'legitimate power' is based on a person's perception that he or she has a legitimate right to exert power and control on others, Matilda's parents, as authority figures, reflect that legitimate power as they exercise authority on Matilda. Unlike normal parents, Matilda's parents do not encourage or insist on her reading but

rather emphasise watching television. They even discriminate against Matilda in terms of gender as they always prioritise their son Michael over Matilda, notwithstanding the fact that Matilda is far more brilliant than him. Matilda comes to decipher her parents' antagonistic stance and utter neglect towards her, which she feels is entirely undeserving. Understanding that she needs to fend for herself, she goes to a public library all by herself, where she meets the first sympathetic and caring adult in the figure of the librarian Mrs Phelps. In fact, Mrs Phelps is one of the two adult figures who is portrayed in a favourable light in the novel, the other being Miss Honey. The narrator's voice itself draws positive emotional response for them as Mrs. Phelps is shown to be "concerned about the child's (Matilda's) safety on the walk through the busy village High Street" (12) while Miss Honey is depicted as a "mild and quiet person" having a lovely, pale madonna face" who "never raised her voice" (50).

Power and Resistance: Foucault's Paradigm in *Matilda*:

The concepts of power, authority and resistance are integral, and as Foucault argues, power shapes resistance. Power is the force that produces resistance, determines its place and administers it. Matilda steadfastly resists the unjust imposition of power on her on the part of her parents by devising different forms of revenge for them in her own way, which in turn transforms them into the grotesque caricatures of their previous selves. It is one of the unique strategic devices of Dahl by which he subverts the hierarchy of adult authority and thereby wins the hearts of his child readers by providing them spontaneous source of humour. Being continually oppressed by her father, Matilda once squeezed a line of superglue very neatly all round the inside rim of her father's hat, so that "Mr. Wormwood had to keep his hat on all through the supper in front of the television" (26). He definitely looked ridiculously grotesque, which is emphasised by Mrs Wormwood's observation of her husband: "And later on, as she watched her skinny little husband skulking around the bedroom…she thought how stupid he looked. Hardly the kind of man a wife dreams about, she told herself" (26). He looked all the more ridiculous when Mrs Wormwood had to "chop the hair off right to the skin, so that he finished up with a bald white ring around his head" (26). Matilda was much

ahead in maturity in comparison to the children of her age, and thus, while the unjust imposition of parental control would have made other children "burst into flood of tears", Matilda, the narrator asserts, "seemed to know that neither crying nor sulking ever got anyone anywhere" (20). Since she also seemed to know that "The only sensible thing when you are attacked is, as Napolean said, to counterattack" (20), her "wonderfully subtle mind was already at work devising yet another suitable punishment for the poisonous parent" (20). As Mr Wormwood used to take pride in his wonderful black hair, Matilda mixed a considerable amount of her mother's platinum blonde silver dye, so that "Mr. Wormwood's fine crop of black hair was now a dirty silver…that has not been washed for the entire circus season" (46).

The Grotesque Humour and Carnivalesque Subversion of Power:

The grotesque caricature of her father's figure is Matilda's way of subverting authority through mockery, which provides an instantaneous source of subversive humour to the children. Mark West cogently argues in his article "The Grotesque and the Taboo in Roald Dahl's Humorous Writings for Children" that "The humour that runs through Dahl's depictions of revolting behaviour is enhanced, at least in the opinions of children, by the fact that he often attributes such behaviour to the adults. Psychologists have long noted that children enjoy jokes and stories that poke fun at the moral authority of the adults" (125). Dahl himself admitted in an interview that he likes to poke fun at the pretentious grown-ups, as the children instinctively delight in seeing those adult characters being the subject of satire. Dahl's text therefore embodies the spirit of the carnivalesque as Matilda unambiguously challenges the authority figures through humour, mockery and satire. If John Stephens explains that carnivalesque children's novels "create roles for child characters which interrogate the normal subject positions created for children within socially dominant ideological frames" (120), Dahl's Matilda aptly fits into the category of a carnivalesque children's fiction. Again, if Bakhtin's concept of the 'grotesque body' involves undermining that which is supposed to be noble, honourable and sublime in such a way so as to make it appear degraded, Matilda, through her grotesque distortion of the authority figures, clearly reflects the spirit of Bakhtin's notion.

Naming as a Subversive Strategy:

Apart from the narrative voice and the grotesque projection of the adult characters, naming happens to be another important tool for Dahl in subverting the traditional hierarchy of the child-adult power relationship. Dahl uses naming to set in motion a psychological process that creates particular associations and influences the readers' response towards the respective characters. The name Matilda derives from the Old High Germanic name 'Mahthilda', consisting of 'mahti', meaning 'might' or 'power' and 'hildi', meaning 'battle'. Matilda, therefore, literally means one who is powerful in battle. This implication befittingly applies to Matilda as she proves to be mighty enough in the battle against her rivals. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 'wormwood' is 'a plant with a bitter flavour'. The word wormwood has a Biblical reference as well. In the New Testament, wormwood is a star that falls on earth and poisons the water of the earth. The implication of poisonous acerbity fits aptly to Mr and Mrs Wormwood as they exacerbate their daughter's life with inhuman indifference, insensitivity and negligence. The association of the name Trunchbull is perhaps easiest for the child-readers to detect. In fact, the narrator describes her as having all the traits of a formidable creature of a bull. The naming of Miss Honey too defines her traits befittingly, as like 'honey' she epitomises sweetness, softness and delicacy.

The Paradox of the Precocious Child:

Though Dahl here intends to show a child's fight against the evil adult antagonists, it must be mentioned that Matilda, being a precocious child, gives the impression more of an adult than a realistic child. She is endowed with high intellectual capacity, an advanced sense of morality, independence, maturity and power of social interaction that all contradict her portrayal as a child. Matilda's intelligence has a far reach and is responsible for all the knowledge she has acquired so far by reading Dickens, Kipling, Hemingway, Steinbeck and so on, only at the age of five. She has the intellect of an adult, allowing her to recognise the significance of reading. In spite of being so young, she has an advanced sense of morality, which is even denied to her parents, who rather exult in swindling people. Matilda's sense of repugnance towards her parents

for their lack of morality is evinced in her comment- "If they would read a little Dickens or Kipling, they would soon discover there was more to life than cheating people and watching television"(29). Matilda's nimble mind also seems to have given her logical power of analysis that borders on adult intellectual understanding. Miss Honey, her class teacher, seems to acknowledge this, and thus she confides in her and shares with her a secret of her life that she has not hitherto done to any adult, let alone a child. Conclusively, that she takes Matilda to be no less than an adult becomes evident in her own comment: "You are so much wiser than your years, my dear…that it quite staggers me. Although you look like a child, you are not really a child at all because your mind and your powers of reasoning seem to be fully grown-up. So I suppose we might call you a grown-up child, if you see what I mean" (195). Miss Honey then proceeds to reveal to Matilda all the secrets that weigh heavily upon her heart, and Matilda's age seems to fade away as her role gets transformed from Miss Honey's primary school pupil to being her therapist. As a consequence of the information that Matilda receives, she takes it to be her own responsibility to rescue Miss Honey from her desolate condition, in which she is confined. In doing so, their roles and identities are reversed as Matilda, the child, emerges as the adult protector of grown-up Miss Honey, who appears to be all the more like a child. Kristen Guest in her article "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Resistance and Complicity in Matilda" rightly observes: "Rather than offering Matilda guidance, however, Miss Honey becomes her willing subordinate. […] Describing Matilda as "a grown-up" not only allows miss Honey to claim a confidante but also to identify herself as the converse: a childish adult" (248).

Conclusion:

Roald Dahl undoubtedly articulates an alternative discourse of child–adult power relations in *Matilda*, one that unsettles the authority traditionally vested in adults and repositions the child as an empowered subject. By aligning the narrative perspective with the child protagonist, Dahl offers young readers a subject position markedly different from that found in conventional children's literature, where adult control is often normalised and unquestioned. As Maria Nikolajeva succinctly observes, Dahl's enduring appeal lies in his faith in the

"competent" child, a stance that is simultaneously liberating for child readers and unsettling for adult arbiters of children's books ("Fantastic Mr Dahl").

Yet, *Matilda* also exposes a tension within this alternative discourse. While Matilda is celebrated as a child heroine, her triumph over oppressive authority is enabled largely through qualities associated with adulthood—advanced intellectual maturity, rational judgment, emotional self-regulation, and moral clarity. Her resistance does not emerge from childlike vulnerability or playfulness but from an almost adult mode of cognition and ethical reasoning. In this sense, Dahl secures the child's victory by partially dissolving childhood itself. The novel, therefore, complicates rather than simply overturns the child–adult dichotomy. Matilda's empowerment depends on a strategic blurring of boundaries between childhood and adulthood, suggesting that resistance to authority is possible only when the child assimilates adult competencies. Consequently, *Matilda* reveals both the strength and the limitation of Dahl's counter-discourse: while it challenges oppressive forms of adult power, it also implies that autonomy and agency require a departure from conventional notions of childhood.

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From Warning to Accusation to Threat: A Speech Act Analysis of Greta Thunberg's Climate Rhetoric

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Abstract

Conversations about climate change and the uncertain future that it prognosticates are not new phenomena. For decades, several climate activists have been vocal about saving the planet for a better future and how vital it is for people in power to take action. However, none of these calls for action had the far-reaching effect that the Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg managed to create by successfully communicating the urgency of the situation. Her speeches have been a major catalyst in her emergence as a global icon, wherein 'how' she addresses the issue by using language to the desired effect has made all the difference. The paper argues that the effect of her speeches primarily rests on the choice of her utterances and the speech acts she performs in and through those utterances. Using Austin's theory of Speech Acts and Searle's classification of Illocutionary acts, the paper analyses language as action in the select utterances from a few of Greta Thunberg's most famous speeches with an aim to understand their meaning, force, and intended effect. By examining how Thunberg's utterances move from warning to accusation to threat, the study attempts to discuss whether her rhetoric has the potential to transform climate discourse into a forceful mode of political action.

Keywords: Speech Act theory, Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis

1. Introduction

In a nationally representative survey of US adults, those who were familiar with Greta Thunberg were more likely to engage in activities such as campaigning, voting, protesting, and calling out authorities. This effect has been termed 'The Greta Thunberg effect' (Sabherwal 322). A significant part of this familiarity

stems from her actions, ranging from sitting on hunger strikes outside her school to delivering speeches at various international platforms, through which she has mobilised people, especially youth, to contribute to the climate cause. Greta's actions have always been directed towards raising awareness and getting people, especially those in power, to take action. Besides her belief in scientific facts regarding climate change, which she constantly asserts throughout her speeches, some utterances are more complex and are therefore not straightforward cases of "telling it like it is" ("Address at the World Economic Forum"). The aim, therefore, is to understand the meaning-making process behind such utterances by analysing, primarily, the indirect illocutionary acts performed through them or the force behind the literal or locutionary meaning of the sentences.

To understand the process of performing a speech act, the analysis dwells on J.L. Austin's classification of speech acts into locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts as laid out in his posthumously published work *How to do Things with Words* (1962). According to Austin, in issuing an utterance, the speaker simultaneously performs three acts: the locutionary, or the act *of* producing an intelligible, acceptable, and meaningful utterance in a given language; the illocutionary act, or the act performed *in* uttering the meaningful sentence. This act is central to the speech act theory since it is through this act that the force of the utterance is generated. In other words, the performance of this act tells how the utterance is to be taken or understood based on the given relevant context, such as the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, the nature of ongoing discourse, the shared cultural beliefs, and so on; and finally, the perlocutionary act or the act of affecting the hearer *by* the utterance. The present analysis centers around a study of the illocutionary acts and the possible perlocutionary intentions associated with the illocutions. The analysis further draws from Searle's "Classification of Illocutionary Acts", and also on the conditions for a successful performance of the illocutionary act in "What is a Speech Act?".

2. Analysis

The paper analyses three utterances drawn from publicly available transcripts of speeches delivered by Thunberg at three different international platforms. The selected utterances are not arbitrarily chosen; rather, they are marked by discursive prominence within their respective speeches, either through

stylistic foregrounding such as repetition and parallelism, or through their placement at structurally significant positions within the overall discourse. Their prominence renders them particularly suitable for a close pragmatic examination.

The analysis proceeds within the theoretical framework outlined earlier, wherein each utterance is examined by first identifying its propositional content, then determining the nature of the direct illocutionary act performed, and subsequently exploring any indirect illocutionary force that may be operative. Finally, attention is paid to the possible perlocutionary intentions associated with the utterance in its broader discursive context. The examples discussed are not intended to serve as an exhaustive or statistically representative sample of Thunberg's rhetoric; rather, they function as illustrative instances through which recurring pragmatic strategies in her climate discourse may be examined. Where necessary, the relevant co-text is reproduced to preserve contextual coherence.

2.1 "Our House is on Fire"

This utterance occurs at the beginning of the speech that Greta delivered at the World Economic Forum in Davos on January 25, 2019. She begins by saying:

> Our House is on Fire. I am here to say, our house is on fire ("Address at the World Economic Forum").

Since there is no performative verb associated with the first utterance, prima facie, it seems to belong to the class of representatives where the speaker can be said to simply state or inform the hearer about the existing state of affairs while expressing her belief in the truth of the stated proposition. As Bach and Harnish argue, taking the proposition expressed in the utterance as *p*, an explicit performative version of the utterance may be represented as: "I state that *p*" (31). That the speaker does no more than state is validated in the conjoining utterance where the same proposition is repeated, preceded by a neutral verb 'say'. However, given the contextual background to the utterance which consists of the hearer's knowledge of Greta's identity as a climate activist and the nature of the topic of her speech, it is inferred that the utterance is non-literal in nature in which "our house" is a metonym for the earth and "fire" is a metaphor for the severe extent of global warming. The sentence may literally

translate to something like "The temperature of our planet is rising at alarming rates". But here, Greta does more than merely inform the hearer of this fact.

The utterance is issued not only to get the hearer to believe that p and to wish that the hearer form the belief that p (Bach and Harnish 32), but with a perlocutionary intent of alerting the hearer regarding the state of affairs so as to get him to take necessary action. Since the illocutionary act of warning has the associated perlocution of alerting (Cohen 500), we may say that the speaker performs the indirect act of warning by performing a direct one of stating. This is further validated by the choice of an utterance, which, taken literally, is issued with the same perlocutionary intent. The speaker, therefore, exploits the effects of the literal utterance on the hearer and uses it to communicate matters of urgency at the global level by incorporating metaphor, metonymy, and arguably hyperbole within the same sentence. The explicit version may be represented as "I warn you that our house is on fire".

Since warnings can take either the directive or the representative syntax (Searle, "Classification of Speech Acts" 3), Greta chooses the latter, thereby using the utterance to perform both the direct act of stating and the indirect illocutionary act of warning. This phenomenon may be termed as Non-literally based indirect strategy (Bach and Harnish 78) wherein the speaker chooses to perform an indirect act via a direct one by using a non-literal utterance.

As a result, the utterance makes use of both the directions of fit mentioned by Searle in his classification as a criterion to distinguish between illocutionary acts of different types (5). While the representative type matches the word to the world, the directive type matches the world to the world. Greta manages to do the latter via the former. The force of the chosen utterance and the intended perlocutionary effect is made clear towards the end of her speech, when she says "I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire. Because it is" ("Address at the World Economic Forum").

The repeated use of 'want' in these sentences makes clear the psychological state expressed in the utterance chosen in the beginning. It not only makes explicit that the illocutionary act is of a directive kind where the speaker expresses a desire to get the hearer to do the action, but also explicitly

states the effects she wants to achieve. The speaker wants people to feel, think, and act a certain way with regard to climate change, and the chosen utterance is an example of how she tries to achieve it through language. The selected utterance is therefore directed towards the dual perlocutionary goal of raising awareness by performing the illocutionary act of informing, and to get them to act by warning.

2.2 "You Did not Act in Time"

This utterance occurs in Greta Thunberg's address to the Members of Parliament in the United Kingdom on April 23, 2019. It appears as part of a larger stretch of discourse where the speaker directly holds the world leaders responsible for their delayed response to the climate crisis. On the surface, the utterance "You did not act in time" appears to belong to the class of representatives, since the speaker asserts the truth of a past event concerning the hearer's inaction. However, within the contextual frame of the speech, it functions as more than a mere act of stating. It performs an indirect illocutionary act of accusation, simultaneously expressing moral indignation and disappointment. Thus, the utterance may be viewed as both representative and expressive in nature, where the speaker not only conveys a factual claim but also communicates her emotional stance toward the failure of those addressed.

According to Searle's classification, expressives are characterized by the expression of the speaker's psychological state with respect to a given situation (11). Here, the speaker's psychological state is that of moral anger and disapproval, while the propositional content of the utterance indicates the addressees' failure to act at an appropriate time. The sentence may therefore be reformulated as "I accuse you of not acting in time," whereby the explicit performative verb 'accuse' captures the force of the utterance. Its perlocutionary goal is to evoke guilt, shame, and self-reflection among the addressees, and to compel them to acknowledge their moral responsibility. The illocutionary act of accusation thus works in tandem with the perlocutionary intention of prompting introspection and corrective action.

The temporal phrase 'in time' further intensifies the illocutionary force of the utterance by implying that the window of opportunity has already passed, thereby reinforcing the sense of irreversible moral lapse. The utterance functions

retrospectively as a judgment on past inaction, yet it also carries a prospective force, implicitly directing the hearers toward immediate rectification. Through this dual orientation, the speaker performs both an expressive and a directive act—expressing moral outrage while urging future accountability. This aligns with Searle's notion of the world-to-word direction of fit, wherein the utterance seeks to bring about a change in the world to correspond with the expressed words.

Moreover, the utterance satisfies the felicity conditions for a successful performance of the expressive-cum-directive act. The sincerity condition is met, since the speaker genuinely believes in the truth of the proposition; the preparatory condition is satisfied, as the addressees are indeed in positions of authority capable of action; and the propositional content condition holds, since the utterance pertains to a verifiable failure. By combining assertion with moral evaluation, Greta converts a seemingly simple past-tense declarative into a powerful speech act that performs the dual function of reproach and exhortation. The utterance "You did not act in time" thus stands as a linguistic manifestation of moral accountability, illustrating how the speaker transforms expression into ethical persuasion through language.

2.3 "We will be Watching you"

At the beginning of her speech at the UN Climate Action Summit on September 23, 2019, Greta responded to a question about the message she would like to give to the world leaders:

> My message is that we'll be watching you ("Transcript: Greta Thunberg's Speech at the U.N. Climate Action Summit").

This utterance is seemingly a case of informing the hearer of what the message is, and therefore belongs to the class of representatives where the speaker expresses belief in the truth of the stated propositions. However, the content of the message, i.e., "we'll be watching you," is significant here for its illocutionary potential. In addition to stating or asserting the proposition mentioned in the expression, the speaker commits herself and others that she speaks on behalf of, to a future course of action while simultaneously expressing the intention of doing the stated action. The utterance may therefore be categorised as a Commissive and may be explicitly represented as: "We promise (you) that we will be watching you". However, there is a caveat to be considered

before categorising such utterances as promises.

While laying down the necessary and sufficient conditions for a successful performance of the act of promising, Searle argues "One crucial distinction between promises on the one and and threats on the other is that a promise is a pledge to do something for you, not to you, but a threat is a pledge to do something to you, not for you" (Searle, 'Speech Act" 11). Drawing on the contextual knowledge that the speech is addressed to the world leaders who have been largely indifferent to the climate cause despite constant calls for action by the young activists, the issued utterance does not seem to favour the hearer and may therefore be interpreted as a threat. The speaker, therefore, begins her speech by presenting herself and the younger generation as a threat to the authorities by keeping an eye on them and watching their actions, since they are seen as the ones responsible for the climate crisis, especially when it is the younger generation who will be facing the consequences. Towards the end of the same speech, Greta makes use of sentences having the same grammatical structure:

We will never forgive you.

We will not let you get away with this.

("Transcript")

These utterances and the one discussed above not only exhibit structural similarity, but are also similar with respect to their illocutionary import. These two can also be categorised under commissives because the speaker commits to an action in the future. The direction of fit for such utterances is world to word, with an intention to do the stated action. Again, it may be understood more as a threat than a promise owing to its not being in the interests of the hearer.

The speech from which these utterances have been taken has received special attention due to its famous refrain, "How dare you!" Although this is an utterance devoid of a proposition, it makes sense in its surrounding context. Consider: "We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!" ("Transcript"). This utterance exhibits negative polarity, and its lack of proposition keeps it from being classed under a representative, a directive, or a commissive. The only possible category in which this utterance can be placed is that of

expressives. It may be seen as an expression of anger as well as disapproval towards the passive approach of the world leaders regarding issues concerning climate change.

3. Conclusion

The analysis of the above utterances is hardly representative of what Greta has managed to do through her speeches; it nonetheless attempts to provide an understanding of the process whereby she achieves the desired output. The support for the activist from around the world is proof that Greta has managed to achieve the desired perlocutionary effect she intended her utterances to produce in the hearers. However, curiously enough, her primary targets seem unmoved by her speeches. The world leaders she constantly addresses in her speeches do not seem to be as convinced and affected by her words. For a communicative act to be successful, it is important that the hearer recognises the illocutionary act performed by the speaker because with illocutionary acts, "we are dealing with acts partially constituted by a contribution from participants besides the speaker (Cohen 497)." This phenomenon is variously termed as 'Illocutionary Uptake' (Austin 120) or the 'reflexive nature of the illocutionary intention' (Bach and Harnish 197). It seems that the acts performed by Greta are either not recognised by those in power, or even if recognised, their status in the power hierarchy stops them from being positively affected by it. Viewed from their perspective, it is possible that Greta does not fulfil the preparatory conditions mentioned by Searle for a successful performance of a speech act. She is not seen as someone who has the authority to issue directives or threats. It is possible that in their conception of Greta, her utterances, which we analysed as performing the act of warning and issuing the threat, do not count any more than locutionary acts, or utterances devoid of any pragmatic import. We analysed that Greta issues a warning in saying that "Our House is on fire", but the question is, is it taken or recognised as a warning by those to whom she is primarily addressing her utterances?

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Grammar in the Digital Age: How Social Media is Redefining the Evolution of Modern English

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ABSTRACT

The rise of social media has had a significant impact on how we communicate today. It has changed not just how we talk to each other but also how we use language. This study examines the influence of social media on the development of English grammar, emphasising how platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are transforming linguistic conventions. By looking at social media posts, we look at how grammar, punctuation, and syntax have changed. We focus on trends like abbreviations, unusual punctuation, and casual sentence patterns. Although these changes are sometimes perceived as breaking traditional grammar rules, they demonstrate how language adapts to the fast-paced digital world. We want to learn how social media is changing grammar by looking into these changes. The results indicate that social media is significantly influencing the evolution of English grammar, contesting established norms and fostering novel opportunities for linguistic creativity and expression. This study highlights the continuous evolution of language and its responsiveness to modern communicative requirements.

Keywords: Digital Communication, English Grammar, Language Evolution, Punctuation, and Social Media

Introduction

As we move towards a time when digital communication is the norm, the unstructured, fast-paced nature of social media exchanges is putting increasing pressure on language conventions. Social media sites, which let people talk to

each other in real time worldwide, have become places where new language trends start, often breaking the rules of traditional grammar. These platforms encourage short, creative, and new ways of using language, which changes how we make sentences, utilise punctuation, and spell words.

This digital shift has a significant and lasting effect on grammar. Some of these changes are thought to be transient, while others suggest that English grammar is changing in more profound, more permanent ways. The rapidity of these changes raises a compelling question: Do social media merely mirror linguistic evolution, or do they actively facilitate this transformation?

This study examines the syntax of social media communication to determine the influence of these platforms on the future of English grammar, providing a novel perspective on language evolution in the digital era.

Background

The language is dynamic and changes due to historical, cultural, and social factors. Grammatical forms have changed significantly from Old English to Middle English, then to Early Modern English, and eventually to modern English. Such changes are often triggered by technological advances, cultural change, and the need to have better communication. The rise of social media in the past decades has ushered in a new era of language change. Such platforms offer a global communicative space, but they also modify the very fabric of language, encouraging novel usage, lexical condensation, and casual discourse.

Research Problem: The development of language has historically been a slow-moving process; however, with the widespread and rapid use of social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, changes in English grammar have accelerated. This study aims to investigate the impact of social media on the conventions and standards of English, focusing on syntax, punctuation, and morphology.

Purpose of the Study:

The objective of this study is to comprehend the influence of social media on contemporary English grammar. This research seeks to elucidate the linguistic patterns arising in digital communication, emphasising the adaptation of grammar to the evolving digital environment. Linguists, teachers, and communicators

need to understand these changes so they can address the intersection of traditional language rules and the new grammar introduced by social media.

Research Questions: The purpose of this study is to answer many important questions:

- How are social media sites changing the syntax (sentence structure) of English?
- How is social media changing the punctuation rules?
- How is social media changing how words are formed in modern English?
- Do these changes mean that English grammar is changing for good, or are they only temporary?

Significance of the Study

To comprehend the future of English grammar, it is vital to investigate how social media affects language. In both formal and informal English, social media is also becoming one of the leading forms of communication and is expected to reshape the language's use. The current research will clarify the development of traditional grammar, the complications it poses for language preservation, and the integration of new forms of expression into future linguistic structures. These dynamics will be thoroughly understood to give linguists, educators, and language practitioners the tools needed to navigate the current English landscape.

Literature Review

Historical Evolution of English Grammar: The grammar of the English language has changed significantly throughout the centuries, adapting to different cultural and societal needs. In the Old English era (5th-11th centuries), the language was characterised by a very high level of inflection, with intricate verb conjugation and noun declension. Since the fifteenth century, there has been a slow simplification of such inflectional paradigms in Modern English. The shift between Old English and Middle English (12th century to 15th century) was characterised by the sharp erosion of inflectional morphology, and Early Modern English (15th century to 17th century) by the rise of standardisation, in particular orthography and syntax. Actual historical events, e.g., the Norman Conquest, the invention of the printing press, and the codification of English through literary

production, were catalysts for these structural changes. We live in the modern age, where a new wave of rapid language change is underway, mainly driven by digital and social forces.

Impact of Technology on Language: Many researchers have looked into how technology affects the evolution of language. The telegraph and the telephone are early technological inventions that transformed linguistic activity and required information to be expressed in shorter, unambiguous units. The further introduction of the Internet, mobile phones, and social networks has increased the rate of change in language, particularly in informal language. The researchers present arguments demonstrating that the Internet not only enables new expressive modalities but also increases the fluidity of language (Crystal; Tagliamonte). Technologies such as texting, chat applications, and microblogging services enable instantaneous, on-the-spot communication. These contact exchanges often contravene traditional grammatical norms in the ways of expediency, informality, and innovation.

Role of Social Media in Language: Social media websites have been critical in reshaping the course of English grammar. The empirical evidence shows that such platforms lead to language innovation, such as the spread of acronyms (e.g., lol, brb), non-standard syntax structures, and non-standard rules of punctuation, including excessive use of exclamation marks, ellipses, and emojis. Androutsopoulos (2014) and Herring (2013) discuss how social media networks like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram serve as new carriers of forms of written language that do not rely on customary grammatical norms. The use of hashtags, e.g., has created new syntactic patterns which combine traditional syntax with metalinguistic signs. Furthermore, the formal restrictions on the character count on platforms like Twitter promote brevity, leading to the use of abbreviations and deviations from grammar. In this context, social media is not only a reflection of changing communication trends but also a driver of subsequent changes in language.

Language Innovation and Informality: Social media has been very effective in promoting linguistic innovation by fostering informal communication and breaking traditional language boundaries. These platforms encourage people to play with words, allowing new expressions to emerge. Elements of informal language, such as unfinished sentences, missing punctuation marks, and inventive

orthographic plays (such as deliberate misspelling like "thx" instead of thanks or "gr8" instead of great and other similar examples) are the order of the day. According to Baron (2008) and Zappavigna (2012), such informality is not only a temporary phenomenon but a fundamental change in the interactions between people. The pace and international nature of social media make it possible to break the rules quickly, create adaptations that deliver meaning in the most efficient way, or use it for entertainment. This has led to a new type of grammatical convention, which is flexible, fluid, and context-dependent, and which provokes traditional prescriptive norms. However, English grammar has been changing over time, and social media is the latest force shaping it. As they continue to evolve, so will the language used to describe them, and this will provide a slight ray of hope for the future study of English grammar.

Research Methodology

Research Design

In this paper, the research design is qualitative, aimed at exploring how social media has contributed to the development of English grammar. The language aspects of syntax, punctuation, and lexical preferences, whose changes will be explored through corpus analysis of social media content, include syntax and punctuation, as well as lexical preferences across platforms. The qualitative methodology will provide a complete picture of the patterns and subtleties of language use that cannot be easily identified with quantitative methods. Moreover, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with social media users to help gauge how social media affects grammatical conventions.

Data Collection: The study concentrates on three principal social media platforms: Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, due to their extensive usage among diverse age demographics and geographical regions. The collected data will include posts, comments, hashtags, and captions. These are all important ways that people communicate on these platforms. We will look at public posts from both people and brands to ensure we have a wide range of ways people use social media language. Six months will be used to select content to capture new trends and changes in grammatical structures. To cover a wide range of language styles, posts will be sampled across domains such as news discussions, day-to-day conversations, and promotional content.

Sampling Methods: To ensure heterogeneity and data representativeness, purposive sampling will be used. The posts with the most views and that include a popular hashtag on the latest issue will be chosen, as they are more likely to represent the most innovative and original use of language. To reduce prejudice against specific demographic groups of social media users, posts from accounts with varying follower counts will be included. Besides, the study will consist of articles from various lexical registers, including casual spoken language and formal or professional language, thereby enabling an investigation of language use across different social media platforms.

Data Analysis: The thematic analysis will be applied to the data, thereby helping determine common trends in the use of grammar. The main linguistic dimensions will be three, and they will be the focal points:

1. Syntax: Differences in sentence structure, such as the use of fragmentary phrases, non-canonical word order, and omissions of articles or prepositions.
2. Punctuation: The use of unusual punctuation marks, including the use of too many exclamation marks, ellipses, and hash tags, and an investigation of how the punctuation marks are used to communicate a meaning or feeling.
3. Morphology: The creation of neologisms, acronyms, and shortenings, which are often used on social media sites (like "lol," "brb," and "selfie").

The study has monitored grammatical innovations over time and assessed variations in these properties across platforms using this approach. The analysis has identified platform-specific trends and broader cross-platform changes by examining how language evolves across content types, including personal posts, news-related posts, and brand messages.

Ethical Considerations: Since the data will come from publicly available social media posts, it is crucial to consider consent and privacy. To ensure that moral standards are met, all posts considered will come from public profiles or posts that anyone can see. When showing results, user identifiers such as usernames and profile images will be removed or anonymised to protect people's identities. The study would follow ethical guidelines for the use of publicly available data, ensuring that consumers' privacy rights are protected. Also, even if you don't need direct permission to look at publicly available content,

the research will emphasise openness and honesty with data, especially when discussing results related to how individual users behave. If interviews take place, participants will be informed of the study's objective, their voluntary involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. This technique aims to provide a thorough examination of the influence of social media on the development of English grammar, while adhering to ethical research standards throughout.

Research Findings

The examination of social media content uncovers various nascent linguistic patterns that demonstrate the influence of social media on English grammar. We identified several critical grammatical modifications that have become more common with the advent of digital communication by analysing data from Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The main changes concern the use of abbreviations and acronyms, punctuation, syntax, and word structure and morphology.

Language Trends

1. Abbreviations and Acronyms:

- A lot of social media jargon uses abbreviations and acronyms. To save time and keep things short, people sometimes shorten phrases when they talk to each other. Some common ones are "lol" (laugh out loud), "brb" (be right back), "omg" (oh my god), and "smh" (shaking my head). These short forms are commonly used instead of longer ones to speed things up and convey tone or emotion concisely.
- Hashtags have also become a linguistic tool, with terms like #TBT (Throwback Thursday) and #FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) becoming common in everyday English. This shows both the abbreviation of acronyms and the invention of new cultural expressions.

2. Changes to Punctuation:

People who use social media have begun experimenting with punctuation, often in ways that aren't typical. People use too many exclamation marks to show enthusiasm, urgency, or emotion. For example, "I can't believe it!!!" has more than one exclamation point.

- Ellipses (…) are often used to show trailing thoughts, suspense, or an

unfinished concept. They can also be a stylistic choice to show uncertainty or casualness (for example, "I was thinking... maybe we could go out?").

Other punctuation symbols, such as question marks and emoticons, can also be used imaginatively. Emojis are now widely used as grammatical parts, replacing words or punctuation to show emotional subtleties (for example, "That's amazing! ").

3. **Syntax:**

On social media, sentence structure is often more fluid, with users frequently choosing shorter words, partial thoughts, or non-standard word order. For example, instead of saying "I love this!" or "I can't wait for tomorrow!" you might say "Love this!" or "Can't wait for tomorrow!" In casual situations like this, it's typical to leave the issue out.

- It has also been reported that articles and prepositions are missing from entries for instance "Going to the party" (where "the" is missing). This shows a more flexible, faster way of communicating that prioritises speed and efficiency over grammar. Also, conjunctions like "and," "but," or "because" are occasionally left off or replaced with symbols like ampersands ("&"). This shows that people are becoming more casual in their sentence writing.

4. Word Formation and Morphology:

Social media has become a place where new words are made up, and old terms are used in new ways. Hashtags have played a significant role in this trend, often putting words together in new ways (for example, #foodporn, #selfie, and #instagood). These word creations blend speech, branding, and pop culture to create appealing phrases that break grammar rules.

- People often create portmanteau terms on social media to say more complicated things in fewer words. For example, "brunch" means breakfast and lunch, and "bromance" means brother and romance. These new ideas show how social media makes language more flexible and creative.
- Using emojis also creates new ways to communicate without words, altering how meaning is conveyed. Even while emojis aren't words in the

usual sense, they often act as "grammatical" parts of speech, replacing whole phrases or sentences to show how someone feels, what they do, or how they react.

Key Findings in Precision:

- More Use of Abbreviations: People are using more acronyms and shorter forms in their daily social media conversations, opting for brevity over complete, formal language.
- Creative Use of Punctuation: Exclamation points, ellipses, and emojis are used in unusual ways to add tone, emotion, and emphasis to digital communication.
- Flexible Syntax: The way sentences are put together on social media is informal and increasingly fragmented, with articles, prepositions, and conjunctions often missing.
- New Ways Words Are Used: The development of new words, portmanteau words, and idioms based on hashtags shows that language is becoming more flexible and creative.

These results show how social media is changing the grammar of modern English by adding new rules and making people less strict about following old ones. These patterns are likely to become increasingly common in ordinary language use as social media continues to change.

Discussion on Interpretation of Results

The results of this study show that social media has had a significant effect on the evolution of modern English grammar. The use of language on social media sites has transformed how people acquire language, making it less formal, quicker, and more imaginative. The increase in the use of shortenings and acronyms is indicative of the need to be concise when communicating online, where length limits and the speed of social media discourse typically determine how communication takes place. The strict use of punctuation that traditionally belonged to traditional grammar has become an expressive means of demonstrating tone and emotion in online communication. All critical components of this include exclamation points, ellipses, and emojis.

The syntax is becoming more flexible as users are excluding words such

as articles and prepositions to make communication easier. This observation reveals a shift from formal, organised language to a freer, informal style. Trends and hashtags often invent new words and portmanteaus. This is the creative aspect of social media, where language evolves rapidly to suit the demands of modern communication, often with a humorous or imaginative tone.

The results also show that social media is not just a passive medium for language use, but also an active force that changes grammar and linguistic norms and breaks the boundaries of accepted language rules.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings of this study are consistent with prior research regarding the influence of technology on language. Research conducted by Crystal (2001) and Baron (2008) has underscored the significance of digital communication in promoting language creativity and adaptability, especially in informal contexts. Crystal (2001) noted the contraction of language and the emergence of novel forms of expression in text messaging, while Baron (2008) examined how the conciseness of texting and online messaging has led to a more casual linguistic style, often disregarding conventional grammatical structures.

The findings align with the studies conducted by Androutsopoulos (2014) and Herring (2013), which investigated how social media sites like Twitter and Facebook foster linguistic creativity through the use of hashtags, abbreviations, and novel punctuation. Our research corroborates Zappavigna (2012), who identified the proliferation of emojis and non-verbal aspects as essential factors in contemporary online communication. This study builds on previous research by examining a broader array of grammatical variables, such as syntax, punctuation, and morphology, and by analysing these features across several social media sites.

Implications of Modern English

The consequences of these findings on the future of English grammar, particularly in formal writing, are enormous. With social media still influencing how individuals entertain themselves through language, it might become more challenging to maintain the distinction between casual, digital communication and the requirements of formal, academic, and professional writing. The lax

use of grammar in social media, such as omitting articles, overusing punctuation to emphasise points, and creating new words, can also affect formal writing, and the language is therefore likely to collapse under the weight of grammar rules.

The loosening of prescriptive grammar rules is one potential consequence, particularly as digital communication becomes more prevalent. The increasing popularity of informal language patterns might complicate adherence to grammar rules at school and in the workplace. But it also allows for a more open and dynamic perspective on language, one that accommodates change and enables new forms of communication.

The positive side of the developments is that the world of language may become richer and more varied, and better prepared to respond to social and technical requirements. It could also make people more innovative with language, providing them with new communication options.

Concisely, the influence of social media on grammar can make it difficult to use formal language; however, we can also see how language is evolving and how we should be more adaptable and flexible in learning grammar in the digital era. The future of English grammar is likely to depend on the struggle between old and new rules arising from internet communication.

Final Thoughts

This paper demonstrates that social media has played a significant role in shaping contemporary English grammar. Among other things, this has led to the use of numerous abbreviations and acronyms, such as lol and brb, which have facilitated quick, concise communication in a fast, digital world. It was also revealed that people are employing punctuation differently, such as excessive use of exclamation marks, ellipses, and emojis, to express their feelings, the tone they need to take, and what they intend, in a manner beyond the scope of regular rules. The elimination of articles, prepositions, and other syntactic features shows a tendency towards less rigid, less formal language structures. The rate of evolution in digital communication is indicated by the use of neologisms and portmanteau words, which are increasingly composed of hashtags and trending now. The relevance of these findings is that they reveal that social media is not only a means of communicating with others but is also transforming English

grammar rules, leading to the formulation of new regulations and the creative use of language.

The Future of English Grammar

The effect of social media on English grammar is likely to continue and develop as it changes. The vocabulary used on these platforms will probably become increasingly common in everyday conversations, especially among younger people who grew up using technology first. Grammar can also be made still more flexible and adaptable, and more non-standard patterns can be tolerated, both in official and informal contexts. With the increased flexibility and inclusiveness of grammar rules, the line between formal and informal language may blur, particularly in digital communication. With the increased use of non-conventional modes of expression, social media is expected to be a significant influence on English grammar, even in work and academic contexts.

Limitations of the Study: This research provides essential insights into the impact of social media on English grammar; however, it has several limitations. Firstly, the collected data was limited to three social media platforms, namely Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, which means that the findings might not represent the use of languages in all digital platforms, including TikTok, LinkedIn, or YouTube. The research focused on English posts and may have missed language development in non-English-speaking areas. The search was limited to publicly available information, which might not be representative of all language usage among user groups. Lastly, the study's qualitative methodology, though it yielded extensive research, does not provide any measurable evidence of the extent of grammatical change or of its applicability to the general population.

Suggestions for Further Research: Future studies can explore some critical areas that were not undertaken in this research.

- First, it would be helpful to look more closely at how social media affects other languages, since similar changes in grammar may be happening in communities that don't speak English, but with their own cultural and linguistic effects.
- Furthermore, research may investigate the enduring effects of social media on English grammar and ascertain if the tendencies revealed in this study are ephemeral or indicative of a permanent transformation.

- Another area of study would be a comparative analysis of different social media platforms to see whether some encourage more creative grammar than others.
- Finally, examining how social media affects grammar in formal settings, such as academic writing or professional communication, could help us understand how casual digital language might be changing how people talk in more structured situations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the influence of social media on language poses challenges to conventional grammar standards, while also reflecting the dynamic evolution of English. This study offers a look at how digital communication is changing language and provides valuable insights as we continue to navigate this evolving landscape.

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Fabrics of Belongingness: A Dialectical Relation Between Citizenship and Identity in "Jasmine's Father" and "Mammie's Form at the Post Office"

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Abstract

Citizenship is a legal declaration which confirms someone's national identity, whereas identity is a psychological phenomenon which affirms an essence of someone's being. Both reside in different domains: citizenship is a legal construct, and identity is a psychological frame. Identity is a belief that needs internal and external affirmation. Precisely, external recognition or social recognition grants an edge in confirmation of this belief in oneself. Nevertheless, both are complementary to each other for the complete and harmonious development of a citizen. But when, on the contrary, both start striking against each other, a state of social alienation progenates: one feels dislocated and insecure within the same social milieu in which one might have felt a sense of social and emotional security. Having proposed that citizenship does not always guarantee identity and, furthermore, disillusionment with one's status of citizenship leads to social alienation, this paper seeks to explore and contrast the stories "Jasmine's Father" and "Mammie's Form at the Post Office" in the light of the same argument.

Keywords: Citizenship, Alienation, Identity and Identity Crisis.

Like Identity, citizenship is a fluid concept that continues to evolve and shift, especially when considered in the context of globalisation. Citizenship is a concept that gained recognition with the establishment of the formal Nation-State. It is as old as the beginning of the early city-states in ancient Greece. From a simple concept (the idea of providing the legal status to the native resident of the state, which entails protection of his/her rights and duties), it has evolved into a complex one (with the advent of globalisation, strict delimitation of boundaries, an increase in global population rate, and insecurity regarding

the validity of rights) in recent times. This has multiplied the complexity and made it more ambiguous. Not only the term, but the very idea of being a citizen has been encircled by a nebula.

To interpret, citizenship is one's legal identity, confirmed by the law of the land or country. A person receives recognition as a citizen of a particular country. John J. Patrick explains the term in as straightforward words as possible, especially in the context of a Democratic Nation, in his article, "The concept of Citizenship in Education for Democracy":

> A citizen is a full and equal member of a polity, such as a democratic nation-state (Mouffe 1995, 217). In some states or countries, citizenship, the condition of being a citizen, is based on the place of a person's birth, which is known as "jus soli" citizenship. In other places, the status of citizen is based on the citizenship of one's parents, which is known as "jus sanguinis" citizenship. Some countries use both bases for ascribing citizenship. Further, most democratic states have established legal procedures by which people without a birthright to citizenship can become naturalized citizens. (2)

But then again use of the term 'identity' along with the term 'legal' creates ambiguity. To talk about 'identity', it is a psychological phenomenon which ascertains one's essence of individuality. This affirmation is confirmed by the consciousness of one's self. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, in their essay, "Beyond 'Identity'", express that identity is an ambiguous term, "'Identity,' we argue, tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)" (1).

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the fact of being who or what a person or thing is defined as identity (770). The term 'Identity' is relatively recent when it's talked about in the area of social sciences. As Roger Brubaker and Frederick Cooper state in their essay, "Beyond 'Identity'"

> Widespread vernacular and social-analytical use of "identity" and its cognates, however, is of much more recent vintage and more localized provenance. The introduction of "identity" into social analysis and its initial diffusion in the social sciences and public

> discourse occurred in the States in the 1960s (with some anticipations in the second half 1950s). (2)

Although its advent into social sciences is a little certain yet its definition is not certain. Identity as a social concept has not met an exact definition. Stuart Hall aptly argues about the nature of identity in the very beginning of his essay, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora":

> Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (222)

Hence, identity is always in flux and citizenship which efforts to confirm one's identity is in equal flux too. Fluidity of the concept of citizenship can be affirmed from the notion that its meaning keeps on changing with the change in the form of the state and society since ancient times. The rights and the duties of a legally declared citizen alter with the change in the form of leadership of the state.

Despite all the uncertainties in nature, the harmony between the two is most needed for the holistic development of a citizen. One's identity should be realised in one's country of origin, of the land whose citizenship is conferred upon him/her and vice versa. But if somehow it turns the other way round, a complex state of alienation progenates. The alienation which one endures is the estrangement from the social system of the native land. Raymond Williams, in his book *Keywords*, has tried to expound this term by taking into consideration the term 'anomie' popularised by French sociologist Emile Durkheim, "*anomie*, which has been also adopted in English, overlaps with alienation especially in relation to (b) and (c), the absence of or the failure to find adequate or convincing norms for social relationship and self-fulfilment" (36).

Where '(b)' and '(c)' refer to "*meaninglessness* - a feeling of lack of guides for conduct and belief, with (c) *normlessness* - a feeling that illegitimate means are required to meet approved goals" (36) respectively.

Social alienation, which the clash between citizenship and identity produces, leaves a person devoid of a sense of belongingness. One starts to

feel dislocated in the same milieu that once provided a sense of social and emotional security. Robert Ankony well defines alienation in his essay, "The Impact of Perceived Alienation on Police Officers' Sense of Mastery and Subsequent Motivation for Proactive Enforcement"

> Alienation is essentially a sociological concept developed by several classical and contemporary theorists, especially Durkheim (1951, 1984), Fromm (1941, 1955), Marx (1846, 1867), Seeman (1959), and Simmel (1950, 1971). According to these theorists, alienation is defined as a condition in social relationships reflected by a low degree of integration or common values and a high degree of distance or isolation between individuals, or between an individual and a group of people in a community or work environment. (1)

This present study tries to understand the sense of belongingness and alienation through the dialectics of legal citizenship and social identity. The two short stories–"Jasmine's Father" by Paul Tan Kim Liang and "Mammie's Form at the Post Office" by E.A. Markham, which are the subject of the present study, deal with the social and emotional alienation of the protagonists. Both experience an identity crisis. The difference is that one feels it in her homeland, whereas the other bears it in a foreign land. However, the similarity is that both possess the citizenship of the lands where they feel dislocated.

In the story "Jasmine's Father", Jasmine, the protagonist, bears the repercussions of alienation when the system in her motherland starts revoking the thread tied between her identity and her citizenship. The sense of security, which should be a matter of confirmation, is vexed by a protruding sense of insecurity. Consequently, Jasmine migrates to Canada after seeking permanent residency. She decides to move away from her land of birth, Singapore, as she feels dissatisfied with the system. The dissatisfaction does not just result from the unjust and unfair system of Singapore but from her dissatisfaction with herself, which results from the unjust treatment doled out to her on that land. Jasmine works in a company. She is highly ambitious. On one side, her proliferation makes her enthusiastic; on the other, this becomes a threat to her colleagues. She is superseded by a nerdy colleague when her impending promotion is conferred upon him. She takes it as a setback. She finds, "that

there was an element of sexism—and yes, even racism involved—because that Chinese guy was simply undeserving" (Liang 48). The sense of discrimination makes her sensitive towards the estranged treatment being meted out to her. This further leads to her loss of faith in the system of the country where she was born and brought up, and holds legal citizenship. She feels, "the system, which she already had precious little faith in, was irredeemable" (Liang 48).

Jasmine's issue with the country of her birth is much more than a matter of being just and unjust. Her identity is not realised in her motherland. She feels strange with the system as she is not being given the chance for recognition, which is the basic tenet for identity realisation. As identity and its realisation are both matters related to the psychological domain, their non-realisation also destroys the psychological being of a person. The mental turbulence that Jasmine bears is associated with her feeling of being treated as a foreigner in her motherland. She suffers from social alienation for being unacknowledged for her abilities. The quest for identity makes her change her citizenship.

The basic idea of citizenship is forfeited when she applies for PR in Canada. She is not assured of her identity in her native land. Her eagerness to move to a foreign land eloquently states her frustration with the system of Singapore to which she addresses as "The system—a sum of cold bureaucracy, inept management and prejudiced decision-making" (Liang 48), and this system appears to her estranged. She tells her father that although she does not have a concrete job offer right now but she is sure she will get one before she leaves for Canada. Her trust in the system of Canada and, more importantly, her faith in the realisation of her ability in that system and country, make her seek its citizenship.

On the other side, Mammie from "Mammie's Form at the Post Office" feels hazardous in a foreign land, despite having its citizenship. Mammie's issue with the land of her immigration is not only about the cultural differences but of the identity crisis. Mammie, an elderly lady who immigrated to the United Kingdom from the West Indies in her later years, finds the system and people of the UK strange because her identity is not reified there. Her censorship of the system at the post office and the people results from their unacknowledged behaviour. Mammie visits a post office to send some money home (West Indies) to her

friend, Murial. Murial tends Mammie's house plot and the headstone of her uncle's grave. Thus, out of gratitude, Mammie wants to send her some money so that she does not have to bear the monetary burden upon herself. For this purpose, when Mammie goes to the post office, her greeting at the post office under the cover of bullet-proof glass cabins makes her feel queer and accused. "It embarrassed her that all these post-offices now had bullet-proof glass shutting out the customer—really, it was offensive to treat people like this—she was almost beginning to feel like a criminal" (Markham 94). She has to stand in the queue to get her work done. This act instils her with nostalgia about her homeland, where "Mammie never had to stand in the yard; she would send over either Sarah or Franco; or if she didn't think of it, Tudy would put the letters aside, and probably bring them over herself the next night" (Markham 94).

The issue of identity crisis resonates and further aggravates when the boy at the counter states that there is no difference among the people from Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and the West Indies. He hands her a form to be filled out for the transaction of the money. She starts reading with the help of her glasses. She finds that the form is meant for people sending money to Bangladesh and Pakistan. She thinks the amateur boy has given her the wrong form. But when she asks the boy about the discrepancy, he says, "it didn't matter—West Indies was the same as Bangladesh" (Markham 95). His reply stupefies her. She feels a setback but gets enraged too, "the West Indies, where she was born and grew up and where all her family came from, and where her mother and the rest of her relations died and were buried, was the same as Bangladesh which was somewhere near India, where she'd never set foot in her life" (Markham 95). She tries to fill in the various clauses of the form, but ultimately finds the prices too high for the transaction in comparison to the previous year; she leaves the post office disappointed and infuriated. Her frustration does not only creep from the unsuccessful transaction but also from issues her identity encounters there. The kind of realisation and recognition that she used to enjoy in her motherland, she is unable to get here. No doubt she, like Jasmine, possesses the citizenship of both lands, but her identity is not confirmed at either. This is true for the case of Jasmine, too, although in reverse. Her native country does not ascertain her identity; contrastingly, Mammie's land of immigration does not extend the same.

Citizenship does not always guarantee Identity. But an underlined harmony is needed between two for the congenial growth of a citizen. Jasmine's alteration of citizenship asserts that identity is a necessary social affirmation which acts as a guiding stone. Ironically, the very concept of citizen, which assures the affirmation of one's identity, in Jasmine's case, acts null and void. She faces a crisis at that front, but she does not succumb to it. She can stand up for herself. She achieves her identity and ambition in a land which is not her motherland but which confirms her status of being its citizen. Over her weekend telephonic conversation with her father, she often claims her fondness for the country and her work there, "her calendar is always crowded with interesting appointments with chatty, effusive people. Weekends are spent trekking some pristine patches of nature or learning the finer points of wine-tasting" (Liang 47). Her personality gets its realisation in the country and system of Canada.

Mammie, on the other hand, leaves the post office with disappointment, even when she is pushed aside by somebody from the queue; she feels, "she wasn't going to argue with any of them" (Markham 95). This states that she feels like a stranger on that land and therefore, she does not even feel like arguing there.

This paper seeks to assert that although citizenship confirms one's national identity but it is not the only means for identity realisation. Jasmine and Mammie stand as the two victims of citizenship as well as of an identity crisis. The very idea of citizenship should be reified through the fulfilment and the protection of the rights of the citizens so that their identity never has to envision forfeiture. The quest for identity cannot always be realised through just confirmation of one's identity on legal terms; it is much more than that. It is a sense, a belief, a security, an association, and a feeling of belongingness that reifies identity. Thus, establishing a dialectical relationship between citizenship and identity; which contradict, reconceptualise, and influence each other.

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Decoding Human Nature Through Sudha Murty's *Wise and Otherwise-A Salute to Life*

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Abstract

Sudha Murty is a well- known name in the Indian academic and literary panorama. She is a renowned writer who has more than forty-two books to her credit, including novels, short stories, travelogues and children's books. She is a multifaceted personality: a member of Rajya Sabha, an academician par excellence, a philanthropist, a trusty and a chairperson of Infosys Foundation. She is actively involved in the charity works of her foundation, which includes frequent travels and interaction with people from different strata. Her rich and wonderful experience of life is as fascinating as it is inspirational to the readers. The book contains fifty-one chapters, which are in fact, fifty-one life teaching experiences with a strong message to humanity. This paper aims to provide an insightful study of human nature by decoding various shades of humanity as depicted by the author in the book.

Keywords: Humanity, Philanthropy, Anecdote, Perspectives of Life, Benevolence

As literature mirrors society, so are the writings of Sudha Murty. Her life experiences are a window to understand the complexities of human nature. *Wise and Otherwise* is a compilation of her exploration of human nature. Being a philanthropist and a sensitive soul, she writes with her heart more than with her pen. She always remembers the words of JRD Tata, who had exhorted her to give back to society, to reciprocate what she received. The stories in the book have been categorised as 'wise' and 'otherwise'. The 'wise' showcase human values like kindness, compassion and empathy, while 'otherwise', depict the darker shades of humanity; stories of ungratefulness, betrayal and insensitive hearts. Whatever qualities they relate to, they are all deeply grounded in her rich experiences and provide a new insight into the complicated human psyche.

Every story brings forth different aspects of human nature. Some of them inspire us because of the sheer honesty and simplicity, while others teach us how human frailty operates at every level. Abarna Sri Preethi aptly remarks, "This book is absolutely a wakeup call for all our moral senses" (2). The biggest take away from Sudha Murty's stories is that they teach us that humanity is the greatest virtue and the biggest religion.

The very first story of the book, entitled "Honesty Comes from the Heart", talks about honesty as the highest attribute of mankind. It narrates the story of a rank holder boy, Hanumanthappa, a boy among the top 10 scorers in the secondary school examination of Karnataka. He was the son of a Coolie belonging to a tribal group. His father earned only forty rupees a day. Sudha Murty decided to sponsor his expenses in a teacher-training school. She sent him Rs 1800 for the expenses of six months. After a few days, she received a letter of acknowledgement from Hanumanthappa with some balance money in the envelope. The letter read:

> Madam, it is kind of you to have sent me money for the next six months. But I was not in Bellary for the last two months. Our college was closed for holidays and during the next month there was a strike. So, I stayed at home for those two months. My expenditure during these months was less than Rs 300 per month. Therefore, I am sending you the rupees 300 that I have not used for the last two months. Kindly accept this amount. (Murty 4)

Sudha Murty was taken aback at the sheer honesty of the boy. Though he was living in abject conditions, he came out as an epitome of honesty. Hanumanthappa's story beautifully showcases his strength in adversity, which inspires all. It also shows that honesty is an individualistic trait, irrespective of class or creed. It is unfortunate that honesty and sincerity often go unnoticed in our society, and it often fails to protect the talented and good- hearted students. The author seems to suggest that the balance of goodness and wisdom is a great virtue. The world may not always reward such an attribute, but it is the greatest asset.

The author delves deep into the complexity of human nature. The fact that a challenging situation determines how strongly we uphold the human values is beautifully described in the story "When the Mop Count Did Not Tally". It

highlights how fear of punishment, uncertainty of job and commitment to professional rules govern human nature at the time of crisis. The story takes us to an operation theatre where the doctor and the nurse are both struck in a dilemma whether to stitch the patient's abdomen without ensuring the mop tally. It is a rule during the operation to count and tally the number of mops before and after the operation. A mop is a piece of sterile cotton gauze. Counting it is a precautionary measure so that no piece of mop is left behind in a patient's body. That day, the mop count was one less than it was before the operation. The doctor doubted the nurse that she might have counted wrongly and ordered her to give him the needle to stitch the patient's body. The nurse didn't obey him. The doctor got impatient and threatened to dismiss her from the job. The nurse was firm in her decision. At last, the doctor found the missing mop on the floor under the table. Later, he appreciated her firmness. The nurse didn't compromise her commitment even under pressure. Mrs Murty recalls what her father used to say, "If a patient dies, it is just one more hospital death for the doctor. But for the unfortunate family, it is a permanent loss (26). Through the story, the author highlights the loss of professional ethics and dehumanisation of human behaviour caused due to work load and pressure. Patients are considered only as a task or responsibility to be completed in a scheduled time frame. Retaining professional ethics in the moment of crisis is the best example of nurturing human values.

In another story, the author discusses how poverty and hardship of life make people insensitive to the sufferings of the older generation. The story "Death without Grief" presents a realistic and disturbing glimpse of human nature. She narrates her experience at her neighbour's house, whom she visited to offer her condolences on the death of the owner's mother. But to her surprise, nobody in the house seemed in mourning. There was a Kannada song playing in the background, and children were watching a movie with great interest. Even the owner and his wife didn't show any sign of grief. Rather, they looked eager to talk about Sudha Murty's business, about her husband, her sarees, her company, about the admission procedure in her college, etc. They talked about everything except the deceased woman. At last, the author herself inquired about the deceased woman. The owner's wife said, "Actually, we suffered a lot,' Of late she was bedridden with a stroke. To look after such people in a

place like Bangalore, one requires servants and you know how difficult and expensive it is to get a good servant. I was so tired of looking after her. It was good riddance. The lady's tone was harsh and cold" (21). Mrs Murty was shocked and saddened by the utilitarian view of the daughter-in-law. The story showcases the stark reality of our society in which grief is proportionate to the usefulness of the older generation. The hectic city life and struggle for living have resulted in emotional exhaustion. To some extent, it is not just individual hardness but the collective failure of our societal structure which forces people to normalise suffering. While the elite class view death as a deep emotional event, for the poor and struggling lot, it is just a routine occurrence. Emotional numbness is not inhuman. It is an adaptation to an inhuman world which does not allow some people afford to feel.

Sudha Murty not only describes the golden hearts of great souls but also takes us to the realm of insensitive hearts of selfish and mean- minded people. In the story entitled "India the Worst of Both Worlds". She exposes the insensitivity of a heartless son who brought his father to Sudha Murty, saying that he was a stranger, a helpless old man he met at the station. Sudha Murty, pained by his pathetic situation, sent him to an old-age home. It was only at the time of the death of the old man that she understood the whole story plotted by the son, just because his wife wanted to get rid of her father-in-law. To add to her surprise, the old man had kept a passbook which had more than one lac rupees with his son as the nominee. Sudha Murty seldom reacts harshly to human follies, but this incident was beyond her tolerance. The degree of self-centeredness of the son infuriated her. She lashed him for his shameless act and for setting a bad example. Here, she seems to be a bit more didactic in her response. She chided both of them like a teacher. She should have been more sympathetic towards the father, as he was not in a position to oppose his son. In fact, Murty was also disappointed by the act of the old man who could have rather given the amount to the old age home instead of giving it to his ungrateful son. She says, "In India we have the worst of both worlds where children neglect their parents and parents routinely leave their property to their children" (36). The moral bankruptcy of the son, lack of social responsibility, and his helplessness in front of his insensitive wife are clear indicators of declining human values in society.

The writer time and again expresses her concern over women's safety.

She narrates an incident that occurred with her in Stockholm in the story "The Truth about Women". She was surprised when a taxi driver charged half of the actual fare because she was travelling alone at night. She wonders what we people do in India. We don't even dare to travel alone at night. Even if someone does, the taxi will surely charge at least double the actual amount. She aptly remarks, "We just talk but they practice" (146). The author is surprised to know that the names of the countries where women enjoy freedom in all respects are not America or Britain. They are the three Scandinavian countries, namely Sweden, Norway and Denmark. India is quite lagging behind the list. We talk about women's empowerment; we worship goddesses for power, wealth and knowledge, but reality in our country is far away from what is preached. In the story "Stove Bursts or Dowry Deaths?" she brings forth the plight of young girls from poor families, allegedly called 'stove burst victims', who in fact are dowry deaths. Tears came in the writer's eye when such a dying girl voiced out her dying statement, "Amma, I do not know how long I will live. But I want to tell you something. If only my parents had educated me, if I had a job, if my parents had fewer children, I would not have come to this position" (74). The author accepts with a heavy heart that women in India are still identified in relation to their male counterparts. They have little contribution in decision making process. To worsen the situation, women themselves are the worst enemies of other women. But still, they are excelling in such an environment, which is really a matter of pride. Sudha Murty is a great advocate of education for women, their self-Reliance and self-confidence. According to her, even if a woman is working or earning for her family, she may be subjected to dominance and suffering sometimes because of a lack of confidence. She opines:

> Education means more than scoring good marks in exams or receiving certificates. Life is an exam where the syllabus is unknown and question papers are not set. Nor are there model answer papers. There are various types of questions that can come from any direction, but one shouldn't run away. Education and financial independence are tools that can help us face difficulties but confidence must be developed throughout life. (140)

Not all is white to the author's experience. In the story "Pay or I will Commit Suicide", she mentions the audacity of a woman who sent a letter to the author

saying she had incurred huge losses in the stock market, and she asked Sudha to pay all the loss which was about five crores. She also threatened her that she would commit suicide if the money is not paid and that Sudha Murty would be held responsible for this. The author encounters different types of people who sometimes honour or praise her to request something. If denied help, they in turn become hostile to her. She shares her experience of meeting women who hide their diamond studs in purse to seek financial help, she has seen well-off parents declare their children as orphan and men who pretended to be helpless and presented their parents as destitute. The deep labyrinthine of human nature is multi-layered and multifaceted, much beyond our understanding.

The writer emphasises the importance of living life with positivity, which, according to her, is not a privilege of the affluent only. In the story "Think Positive, Be Happy", she talks about the positive attitude of her housemaid Girija. Girija lived with her son and was always cheerful, neatly dressed and looked contented. She was never sad about our grumbling. One day, Sudha Murty asked her where her husband was. She replied, "He is here with another woman and works for your neighbour as a driver" (122). It was really surprising that she saw her husband daily with another woman and was still full of positivity. What was even more surprising to Sudha Murty was her reply:

> I think I am lucky because I have only one child to support. My son is bright and obedient. Because his father deserted us, my son is more concerned about me. If I was all alone or if I had many children or if my child was irresponsible then I would have had serious problems. God has been kind enough to me that I don't have any such problems. (123)

Girija's story reaffirms the importance of positivity in our lives. It is our mindset which makes us happy, not financial or social conditions. Happiness does not usually come with money; it comes with our attitude.

Sudha Murty's life is a saga of countless experiences. She helps all those whom she finds in need of help. But different people acknowledge her deeds differently. In the story "Salam Namaste" she narrates a heart-rending story of a poor woman Zubeida, who died of cancer. Sudha Murty donated fifty thousand rupees for her operation. When she realised she was incurable, she asked her brother not to waste more money on her treatment and requested him to return

the remaining three thousand, which could be used for another sick person. She didn't forget to thank the author even on her deathbed. The largeness of Zubeida's heart moved the author. In the concluding story of the book "Three Bright Young Men", she again highlights the difference in the attitude of people toward her help. Once, she visited a hostel for poor children where she met three bright students. She sponsored their expenses of studies and forgot about the incident. Years passed by, and Sudha Murty once happened to meet one of them who had opened a saree shop. He acknowledged wholeheartedly that Sudha Murty had once helped him. He handed her a packet in which he had gifted a saree and left a note saying, "Ma'am it was very kind that you paid for my fees without knowing me. Many times, I have wondered why you did that. I was a total stranger and not related to you at all. You never expected anything from me. Now I have made it appoint to help people who are not related to me without any expectations" (218). Sudha Murty was touched by his sensitivity and gratefulness. On the contrary, the attitude of the second boy, who had become a doctor, was completely opposite. The author met him accidentally when she visited the hospital to get treatment for her swollen foot. The doctor didn't even mention that Sudha Murty had ever helped him. Moreover, he charged an extra amount because she had not taken a prior appointment for the treatment. These incidents clearly emphasise that humanity is something very personal. Different people have altogether different perspectives towards human values.

Wise and Otherwise serves as a mirror to the author's own nature also. Her stories vividly portray her emotional clarity. She is a woman deeply influenced by humanism, altruism and empathy. She is humanistic in her approach, even when she confronts cruelty, hypocrisy and insensitiveness. She seldom indulges in moral aggression. She firmly believes that human beings are a product of their circumstances. So, we should not be quick and judgmental in our opinion. Her characters are mostly chosen from the lower strata of society. Nazma Yasin aptly remarks, "Sudha Murty opts to be like one from the common masses and this is what connects her to every person" (122). Her lived experiences are deeper than intellectual theories. In spite of being highly learned and experienced, she refrains from preaching. While narrating the stories of utter hopelessness, her tone is optimistic as she has faith in human goodness. She understands human flaws, yet she is hopeful in human virtues. The simplicity

of her language and slight didactic tinge leave a lasting mark on the minds of readers. She is a realist as she portrays lives as they are. Her focus on binaries like black and white, rich versus poor and rules versus humanity brings her close to the structuralist theory, but above all, she is a humanist in her emphasis on human values like ethics, empathy and moral responsibilities.

Wise and Otherwise decodes human nature not only by teaching life lessons but also through depicting multifaceted human experience. It depicts that human nature is deep, complex and often contradictory. People can be kind and cruel, selfish and compassionate. Human behaviour is deeply influenced by social context. Wisdom and folly exist in every class of society. Greed and desire for status often shape our decisions. According to the author's life experiences, hardships and keen observation shape our understanding more than bookish knowledge. The conglomeration of varied shades of human psyche makes the stories a joyful learning of human nature.

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The Dead Man's Frame: Unreliable Narration and Spectral Resistance in *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*

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Abstract

This paper offers insight into the unique narrative prowess of *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*. The posthumous narrator envelops the readers in the hunt of his murder. Moon after moon, the spectral uncovers personal truth behind his death and simultaneously discovers collective truths of his nation. His transformation from a hedonist to a witness and later to a truth seeker is being traced in the paper. This is an attempt to draw traditional markers of unreliability closer to cognitive ones. Spatiality is another dimension explored here as landscape shapes the collective memory of this political noir. The dichotomy between the systematic control of the state and the spectral freedom of our dead narrator offers us a perfect intersection to unravel the architecture of Sri Lanka during the 1980s. The paper assumes that Maali's amnesia is not his own, but collective; his disembodiment a political act.

Keywords: Unreliable Narrator, Reader-authority, Amnesia, Memory and Trauma, Spectrality

Introduction

The Seven Moons of Maali Almedia has garnered critical fame for its portrayal of Sri Lanka's tumultuous past. The narrator that permeates every page of the 2022 Booker Prize winner is that of Maali Almeida, a recently deceased voice that navigates the truth behind his death. The novel provides a rich context for investigating unreliability not as a defect in narration but as a purposeful aesthetic and political approach. This endeavour calls for a reimagining of the "Unreliability principle" while navigating Maali's position in

the debate (Booth 158–59). Karuntilaka's intentional use of the status of his narrator, his death, his sexuality and his art, to bring Sri Lanka to an international audience is not only clever but also endearing. The paper offers a double reading into the matter by analysing Maali under both the traditional as well as cognitive scope. It also puts the reader in the spotlight, holding them accountable for the meaning-making along with Maali. Our reconstruction of his memories and the chronology of how he became the voice of the wronged weaves the very fabric of the murder mystery. The text itself is a testimony, rooted in a post-colonial Lanka, fishing out trauma realised through the eyes of the dead. The first part of the paper deals with how Maali can be ranked among characters belonging to a long lineage of ghostly post-colonial narrators; it also touches upon reader-authority in the quest for deconstruction, to draw a bridge to lessen the gap between rhetorical and cognitive theories. The second part treats spatiality as an excavation site to unearth the country's violent past and not so objective truths. It attempts to look at death as an equaliser, an agent which transcends both National Geography and Politics. The third part of the thesis is devoted to applying notions of Hauntology to *The Seven Moons of Maali Almedia.* Utilising unreliable narration as the central analytical framework, the investigation employs qualitative and interpretative methodology rooted in narrative theory, primarily of Wayne C. Booth and the subsequent cognitive reorientation by Ansgar Nünning. It considers unreliability not simply as a rhetorical deviation from textual conventions but as a dynamic interplay among the narrator, narrative discourse, and reader interpretation. Traditional indicators of unreliability, like self-contradiction, moral ambiguity, and gaps in memory, are identified alongside cognitive markers like trauma-induced amnesia, perceptual and narrative disorientation. This dual approach enables the study to connect formal narratological analysis with reader-centred cognitive interpretation. Additionally, the study incorporates spectral theory and hauntology as a secondary yet essential framework, particularly as articulated by Jacques Derrida (10–11). The underlying assumption is that spectrality within the novel serves as a narrative map that disrupts linear temporality, stable identity, and authoritative historical narratives. Furthermore, spatial analysis represents another methodological dimension of the study. By drawing on theories of spatiality and memory, the paper performs close readings of urban locations in Colombo—such as hotels,

streets, detention areas, and bureaucratic spaces—to investigate how space functions as an archive of violence. All spectral projections in the book are emblems of historic erasure; Maali then becomes an important voice of the muted in the larger context of the complex that is Sri Lanka. This paper is invested in answering some of the fundamental human questions: What constitutes the narrator's unreliability? To what extent can the reader impose the so-called universal morality upon Maali? What is so dangerous about a dead soul remembering past wrongs? What is truth in a pluralist world?

Between Confession and Contradiction

The narrator of this story is neither a cynical teen, bending versions of truth as Caulfield does, nor is he a self-proclaimed observer of the fall of Gatsby like Carraway. The voice that haunts each page is Maali Almeida. A newly deceased photographer of the Colombo circle. The entire book can be read as a murder mystery where we accompany him in this urgent mission to uncover the identity of his killer. The self-proclaimed "Photographer.Gambler.Slut" is literally the soul of this story (Karunatilaka 1). What makes Maali a great fit for a Boothian Unreliable narrator? As a witness to the crimes and chaos of his country, his secondary aim (the first being finding out how he was killed) is to expose the hidden cache of photographs that have the potential to expose the atrocities of the Sri Lankan civil war. This moral imperative of his is in alignment with the implied author's critique of his country's corruption. The traditional definition stems from a moral failing or mistake. Maali displays, quite unsubtly, several characteristics that suggest deviation from the norms. He is not an ideal truth teller. The readers are acquainted with his hedonistic life within the frame of the war. He is a philanderer who treats the people who want to help him the worst, and a nihilist who firmly believes chance and electricity are the only gods worthy of worship. His profession is laced with moral ambiguity, where he works for the army, the press, the Tigers, or anybody who pays him enough. He is accused of being a Champagne Socialist (Karunatilaka 44). This is an ideological deviation as he transforms from a fixer, commodifying violence, to a seeker of truth, wanting to expose the reality of war. This is the final service to his war-torn nation. His self-interest compromises his stance as a trustworthy observer. The incongruity is not limited to epistemological dubiousness, but

also the denial of identity. Maali is introduced as a closeted gay man. Although he fiercely denies the label or any fixed marker, he later admits to a series of secret affairs and lifestyle choices. Then there is the theme of personal versus collective amnesia. Concepts like "Ear check" reflect mechanisms to enforce this amnesia within the text to control official narratives (Karunatilaka 1). It is also Karunatilaka's subtle nod to the cosmic equivalent of this afterlife ritual. It can be read as a simile for censorship and controlled forgetting. Much like Orwell's Thought Police, this bodily intrusion was meant to reinstate state-controlled fear (92). The afterlife administration nudges Maali towards the light, which essentially means letting go of all the memories of his earthly life (including that of his own murder). In sharp contrast, Sena declares that justice demands remembrance, making it the only tool of resistance. The corruption in Sri Lanka has weaponised the collective memory of its citizens, replacing it with fear and silence. Maali, as a representative of his country, is trying hard to remember the things he is actively trying to forget. The architecture of the story is crammed with inconsistencies. His blocked memory is confirmed by Dr Ranee, his assigned helper in the life beyond. For instance, he claims he would never put his lover DD in danger but ends up inviting him to a dangerous war zone. It is not just international instability. Internally, too, we see him passionately denying his own death, labelling it as a hallucination. His repeated dismissal of the afterlife, failing to remember significant figures, denied confrontations, and the dismissal of his own disembodiment leads him to think of his state as a trippy dream. He confesses to a documented personal history of exaggeration, sowing the seeds of doubt in the minds of the readers. He can be studied as an axiologically unreliable narrator, positioning him among the ranks of Susie Salmon in *The Lovely Bones* and Dowell from *The Good Soldier*. Maali's unreliability is existential and political in colour as opposed to, let's say, Nick's in *The Great Gatsby*. Besides the obvious difference of being alive, Nick's narration is psychological and socio-cultural, his selective filtering a result of class consciousness. The deception is not only mimetically inconsistent but also structurally strange. The employment of a second-person narrative heightens Maali's fragmented storytelling, lending proof of his slippery commentary. His self-doubt reaches its peak where he makes the reader an accomplice to the mystery: Who is you that's telling the story? He notes that he has always

possessed a voice in his head belonging to someone else. This emphasises the scepticism behind the source of his consciousness. He questions whether his thoughts are really his own or planted by mischievous ghosts and spirits. This second-person narrative faces constant resistance from conflicting accounts by other characters like Sena. This tension between taking Maali's account prima facie or treating him as unreliable is what makes the very spine of the book. The difficulty in resolving these ambiguities is a necessary deception. His amnesia forces readers to reconstruct the chronology of events from uncredible sources and uncertain fragments. His self-awareness of his shifting mental state and memory loss intentionally destabilises narrative truths. Hence, unreliability is reinforced through a series of discursive markers as well as interior paradoxes throughout the text. The fragmentary is not just textual but seeps out of the book, pulling in the willing audience. It then becomes dependent on the reader being an almost co-conspirator by direct implementation of their own moral code of conduct and knowledge onto the story. The narrator's unreliability is in consonance with N**u**nning's reading as an act of Naturalization (89–107). The readers are always doubtful about the events or the narrator's intention, making unreliability a Reader-dependent issue. As co-constructers of the said cognitive instability that provides this book its flavour, we metamorphosize into unreliable interpreters- eager to hold the narrator to a linear and objective rationality. We are as clueless and subverted as Maali, loitering around in the same epistemic mist of chaos. It is believed that it is the author's attempt to engage the readers into interpretive conventions amidst a synergetic universe of Maali's Lanka. We are aware that we are being deliberately mislead that makes us an interactive element in the story.

Space as witness

The afterlife in *The Seven Moons of Maali Almedia* acts as a virtual space, a liminal zone where truths can be narrated, altered and alternative realities can exist. The memory geographies can be used to reflect political violence and personal ethics. Rather than a mass of nothingness, Karunatilaka imagines the afterlife as bureaucracy mirroring the real world. Maali's nothingness functions as a waiting area with help desks and designated booths. Mentions of Beira Lake, urban rivers and docks point towards an intentional effort to ground Colombo as

a Palimpsest. The city's topography acts as a living archive, sites of fictitious and actual violence. The narrative itself is non-linear, jumping from event to event, filling in the blanks for both the readers and the not so trustworthy narrator. Memory itself reconfigures space, elevating it above mere physical coordinates to the ranks of a witness. The characters perish and their significance alters in relation to the story, but stability in confrontation of self-truth. "The moon is always up there, even when you can't see it. You think it stops circling the earth, just because your breath stops?" (Karunatilaka 14). This quote echoes the philosophy of permanence in spaces, linking it to the afterlife. The description of Beira Lake suggests that it has become a renowned dumping ground for bodies, making it a site of violence and memory. The reiteration of Maali's spatial-temporal limitation as Seven Moons (nights) is crucial to the plot. The waxing and waning of the moon reflect our narrator's inconsistent but enlightening revelations about his death. Colombo itself is a manufactured space of surveillance and control. The dead narrator's movement after being absolved of these earthly spaces allows him to freely flow through the narratives, reclaiming his story. This act of counter mapping gives him access to what were typically forbidden areas like the morgue, crime scenes and even private rooms of government officials. His permeability is his re-appropriation. If we adopt the postcolonial reading route, space becomes an agent of not only revelation but also reclamation. The very land of Lanka becomes a psychogeographical island of trauma. After passing on the evidence of the carnage in Sri Lanka, Maali ends up passing into the light having fulfilled his destiny, not by avenging his death, but by being an ethical witness. His transcendence is both as a spectral entity and a bearer of truth.

Politics of Death

Maali is an unlikely avenger of justice, an active spirit symbolic of the unresolved but persistent trauma of War-torn Sri Lanka. The dead actively intervene in the world of the living, forming a link between the imagined Afterlife and Down there. As a spectral remnant of violence and an aftermath of corruption, Maali's death is symbolic not just within the text but outside in the real world. Descriptions of snapped necks and cracked skulls paint the idea that the dead have failed to escape from the horrors inflicted upon their bodies when they were the living. The very fact that the Afterlife is overcrowded is a

hint at the estimated carnage of the nation's civil wars. *The Seven Moons of Maali Almedia* then becomes an apt study of Ethical Haunting. Maali's voice is neither dead nor alive but an omnipresent critique of historic violence. The ghostly narration itself suggests spectral involvement, finding evidence in a posthumous narrator, second person point of view and spirits whispering ideas into our heads. Maali is not just another malevolent spirit, bloodthirsty for vengeance, but an emblem of resistance against the backdrop of the country's political instability. The spectre becomes instrumental in exploring complicated Ethics in a post-truth world. As a dead queer photographer, Maali's demise can be read as the suppression of countless marginalised voices in an era of state-sponsored terrorism. The novel is not just describing what has happened but providing a voice to the silenced. Another spectral figure that garners our attention is the Mahakali -dark heart of Lanka (also called maha sona or Kuveni). This mythical spectral who is said to have thrown herself off the rock after being betrayed is described as the most powerful entity in the In Between and devours lost souls. Sens Pathirana, the devilish figure trying to manipulate Maali, calls his war for justice Mission Kuveni, highlighting how civil wars are often rooted in myths of betrayal. Storytelling then becomes a means of surviving and even surpassing death. There is something poetic about Dahrmendran Stanley, the father of his lover, forcing cyanide capsules hanging from Maali's neck into his mouth and smashing his face with his Nikon 35T camera. The object of remembrance morphs into a weapon to eliminate any deviation from the norm, simultaneously transforming Maali into a spectre. His death liberates him, allowing him access to not only restricted areas and censored spaces but also unlocked memories of his own life. This very supernatural mobility renders him free from state control and consequently reclaims his agency. The author's version of in between is overcrowded and congested with victims of the civil unrest in Lanka. The world of the dead is continuously interfering in the realm of the living. The ghosts also echo the age-old debate of Death as the avenger versus death as the harbinger of peace.

Conclusion

Not only does Maali seem a perfect fit for the traditional definition of unreliable narrator based on fixed textual verifications, but also a key to a

larger debate of 'Who gets to tell the story?'. The evolution of the reader from a passive observer into an engager holding the narrator to an ethical standard and adding richness to the text forms a crucial narratological study. The journey for the truth has a nonlinear trajectory, jumping from one fragmented, questionable memory to another. Everything about Maali, his forgetting, political position, sexual orientation, art and even his remembrance is an act of reclamation. This is a sharp contrast to him being a grey character, someone who confesses to self-deception all along the novel. He represents every citizen who bears the mark of the lived atrocities at the peak of Sri Lanka's political turbulence. This research necessitates a rethinking of unreliable narration, extending beyond its traditional categorisation as merely a formal or psychological deviation. By placing Maali Almeida's narrative instability within the historical backdrop of late-1980s Sri Lanka, this paper illustrates that the unreliability present in the novel is not merely incidental; rather, it arises as a mode of storytelling that is both structurally and ethically significant. Such a perspective reshapes postcolonial narrative ethics by emphasising accountability over resolution and the dubious act of witnessing over the pursuit of certainty. The telling of the plot marred by state-sponsored violence and shared trauma may function not as a form of deceit but as an essential approach for expressing historical truths that defy closure. His photographs are not material objects but archives of bloodshed. Memory itself becomes an independent variable that exists beyond the control of individual consciousness. It is indestructible and omniscient, unlike Maali, who haunts this text. He is presented with this choice: forgetting and moving towards oblivion, or remembering to seek his justice. This forms the underlying theme colouring the very plot. Spaces like war zones, water bodies and government camps morph into abrasions, reeking of authorised control. Even the afterlife is painted as a cosmological bureaucracy reiterating human need to make sense of chaos. It reverberates Karunatilaka's own struggle to impose structure upon the pandemonium of his own nation. Death disbands Maali from all societal restraints, and he speaks from the liminal limbo to narrate his country's story. He asks his readers the infamous post-colonial question: do we bury the past in peace, or do we scrutinise it?

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Tracing Crime, Rebellion, and Transgression in Carroll's Alice through the Conceptual Lens of Marah Gubar

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Abstract

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a foundational text of children's literature that addresses issues of crime, punishment, and justice in a very satirical and playful manner. This novel interacts with Marah Gubar's theoretical suggestions in her book *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* and her essay "On Not Defining Children's Literature" to suggest that Carroll represents Victorian children not only as passive innocents, but also as active agents with the power to query adult authority. An extensive examination of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, its complexity, cultural diversity, and intergenerational popular appeal in accordance with Gubar's study of Wittgenstein's "family-resemblance" model will be explored in this paper. Carroll reflects this diversity by placing Alice in morally complex crime and justice situations, and hence challenges young readers to criticise prevailing societal norms. He further reverses Victorian ideals within fantasy forms of legal anarchy and crime and re-maps the child as self-reflexive, independent agent.

Keywords: Child Agency, Children's Literature, Crime and Justice, Family-resemblance, Golden Age

"Crime" in children, especially within the context of Victorian literature, can be understood to refer not only to criminal behavior but also as a socially constructed category that will come to stand for adults' anxieties regarding childhood forwardness, power, and collaboration with adult culture. The child held a very highly charged symbolic position in Victorian England, where conflicting cultural norms were prevalent. On the one side was the Romantic tradition, as represented by Wordsworth's dictum that "the Child is father of

the Man", which regarded children as morally pure, naturally truthful, and superior to corrupted adults in their perception of spiritual truth (7). On the other hand, the hard reality of the industrial age included overcrowded cities, street children who were either working or begging or were involved in a jittery public conversation about juvenile criminality. Successively, the child was subjected to both courtship and intimidation. These tensions are perhaps best encapsulated in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* in the figure of Jack Dawkins, more commonly referred to as "the Artful Dodger" (45). A growing concern for child welfare articulated itself in the Factory Act of 1833 and the Education Act of 1870, both of which reinforced the division between the "corrupted" child of criminal environments and the "innocent" child worthy of protection (Cunningham 136–38).

This cultural milieu renders adolescent misdeeds both symbolic and legally salient. The juvenile delinquent symbolizes interests in the loss of innocence and the destruction of clear boundaries between child and adult. "The Artful Dodger" in *Oliver Twist* by Dickens symbolised this fear: a child who is full of manners, language, and that kind of guile possessed by an adult criminal, yet is obviously a child. Instead of providing resolutions to these issues, Victorian children's literature often thematises them through narrative experiments in matters relating to authority, obedience, and transgression, creating space for an exploration and navigation of childhood agency.

Marah Gubar in her *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* employs Dickens's "Artful Dodger" as a central instance where Jack Dawkins's thefts in *Oliver Twist* are not depicted as indicators of cleverness that result in achievement but as proof of the depravity of society's effect on children, and he ends up getting caught and shipped away (3-4). For Dickens and other socially engaged Victorians, this precocity of children assuming adult manners, language, and criminality was a portent of the ominous dissolution of the assumed line between youth and adulthood. Yet Gubar demonstrates that numerous Golden Age children's writers like Lewis Carroll refused to depict young criminals as merely victims or pure 'others' soiled by contact with adults. Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, published in 1865, seems a long way from the dark realities of the streets of London. It features no pick-pocketing action, no scene of child

labor or starvation. Its heroine is a girl from the middle class who falls into a land of bizarre creatures and illogical laws. Rather, they would sometimes represent children as "artful collaborators" who might be able to move through, claim, or twist adult structures that encompass structures of theft and deception, without being completely powerless. This expanded notion of "crime" allows one to position characters who engage in literal crimes along with characters whose transgressions are symbolic. To explain these diverse descriptions of evil, Gubar in her "On Not Defining Children's Literature" applies a model that likens such categories to Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblance," (209) whereby members are connected not through one identifying characteristic but through a set of overlapping features. Although Alice's activities in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* are cerebral and rhetorical rather than material, they can be understood using this template as belonging to the same conceptual family as the Artful Dodger's robberies. However, if this approach is transferred to the situation between Alice and the rest, this subversiveness of collaborating does not always work. In the context of Wonderland, collaborating might manifest or manifest itself by means of linguistic correcting and ordering, and there are suggestions that perhaps the concept of agency might not always work.

This cycle is not unique to Victorian England. World literatures acquaint us with characters that, like Alice, blend innocence with guile, typically committing acts which can be called "crime" if judged by adult legal or ethical norms. Nasreddin Hodja, Turkish and Middle Eastern legend's comic folk hero, uses smartness and simulated foolishness to expose power's follies (Shah 45). Operating both inside and outside the regimes of his animal kingdom, the West African trickster Anansi crafts complex schemes to obtain food or advantage (Abrahams 23).In Victor Hugo's Les Misérables, the street kid Gavroche steals, disobeys the police, and lives by his wits, but is also courageous and a loyal friend (567-68). *Pinocchio*, by Carlo Collodi, frequently lies, skips school, and disobeys his guardians, yet these actions pave the way for him to become "real" (89–90). These characters all have a lot in common: they live in societies with arbitrary or unfair laws, and they develop through behaviors that straddle the boundary between compliance and disobedience. Alice is shown as belonging to a world narrative tradition that combines adventure and crime

to create the kid hero when she is placed among them. Alice differs from this in that her transgressions are primarily rhetorical or institutional in nature, departing from the general theme of material transgressions. This has further impacted the symbolic connotation of crime in Carroll's text.

Within this frame, "crime" becomes a metaphor for youth agency in that while theft and plotting are prohibited by law, they can also signal innovation, subversion, and increased social consciousness. This double role of crime as both literal infringement and symbolic action may be related to Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, wherein Alice, although not a criminal legally, repeatedly commits acts of defiance, disruption, and bending of rules against the authority of Wonderland's adult figures.

Throughout the book, Alice consistently refuses to submit to authority without question. She upsets conversational and social conventions in virtually every context into which she enters. For example, she answers, "I do... at least I mean what I say-that's the same thing, you know" (63) when the Mad Hatter tells Alice, "Then you should speak what you mean" (63) during their tea party. In a society where language is constantly manipulated, this scathing reply not only disproves the Hatter's nonsensical claim but also protects her own intellectual autonomy. In the same way, in the Queen of Hearts' garden, Alice does not let the Queen's incessant "Off with her head! Off-" (73) cow her. Instead, she addresses the Queen "politely, yet firmly" (73) a tone that subtly challenges the Queen's display of authority. Although there is no violence or robbery involved, these exchanges challenge established hierarchies in the same way that Dodger's theft challenges the law.

The most conclusive example of Alice's symbolic offence is found in the courtroom scene. Listening to the ridiculous trial of the Knave of Hearts in which evidence is unnecessary and verdicts are given beforehand, Alice remarks, "Sentence first—verdict afterwards," (110) when the Queen says, "Stuff and nonsense! The idea of having the [death] sentence first!" (110). After her open act of rebellion against authority, Alice begins to physically grow, expanding to overshadow the court entirely. Here, the text illustrates that moral and psychological courage can be just as dangerous as physical protestation, while also indicating her burgeoning size and strength are indicative of her rising confidence. Alice responds to the Queen's order to have her beheaded with,

"Who cares for you? You're nothing but a pack of cards!" (110). These remarks bring about the collapse of the whole hierarchical system in Wonderland.

Alice's behaviour demonstrates the characteristics Gubar identifies as defining teenage transgression through these occurrences. She rejects passive conformity, questions authority, and highlights the arbitrary character of regulations, much like the Artful Dodger. The way Alice resists is what distinguishes her from the Dodger, who deals with material property and faces legal repercussions. In contrast, Alice uses cleverness, reason, and symbolic action to carry out her rebellion, which has no legal equivalent. However, both should be viewed as belonging to the same hypothetical "family" of made-up juvenile offenders. Each behaves in a way that challenges authority, asserts independence, and subverts adult structures from the inside out.

This perspective broadens the definition of "crime" in children's literature from a strict legal category to one that is adaptable and relational. Alice is neither a perfect moral role model nor an innocent victim corrupted by Wonderland's madness. Instead, she is an "artful collaborator" who manipulates the logic of the institutions she finds, works within them, and redeems them for herself. Her actions, such as those of the Artful Dodger, upend established power structures and give voice to the kid, proving that the definition of "crime" in fiction goes far beyond the limitations of the law.

Gubar observes in the *Artful Dodgers* that the majority of youngsters in Golden Age literature view rebellious behaviour as a chance for creative exploration. Instead of being overcome by guilt, they approach such situations with curiosity, initiative, and an experimental mindset (3–4). This is also true for Alice, whose adventures in Wonderland are characterised by her small transgressions that lead to new experiences.

The so-called "crimes" she commits are not purposeful attempts to hurt but rather actions toward comprehension and remodeling the bizarre world she has stumbled into. One of the first instances is when Alice consumes the bottle marked "DRINK ME" (Carroll 15) and cake marked "EAT ME" (Carroll 17) without being aware of the consequences. In a traditional moral story, such disobedience of the principle of caution would cause harm, but Carroll turns those actions into gateways to self-knowledge. Various fluctuations in Alice's size serve as a metaphor for the fluidity of identity during childhood, and her

willingness to embrace the unknown reflects the openness to change at the core of her growth. While she is uncertain, questioning if it will be poisonous, she chooses to taste it after logic tells her "if you drink much from a bottle marked 'poison' it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later" (Carroll 16). In this instance, she sees the act as a test, a risky endeavor that opens up a new world. Her desire to test the limits of caution is a manifestation of the spirit of adventure in her behavior. Instead of acting in a mindless rebellious manner, she actively investigates what is beyond the safe and familiar.

As Gubar in her "On Not Defining Children's Literature" earlier-described "family-resemblance" (209) framework suggests, these varied acts like pickpocketing, lying, trespassing, verbal defiance share a network of traits that mark them as forms of juvenile agency. The characters in the novel are linked by shared traits like quick thinking, strategic adaptation, and a readiness to challenge authority rather than a single defining crime. This was made more difficult by Gubar's concept of the "artful collaborator", which rejected the distinction between the corrupt criminal and the innocent victim. Children like Alice don't constantly oppose adult authority; they occasionally assist and frequently take advantage of its resources.

The best example of this interspace is Alice's conversation with the residents of Wonderland. "Who are you?" the caterpillar insists (Carroll 43). Since her changes are so recent, Alice honestly responds that she doesn't know. She then asks him the same question again. By reversing the dynamic, this transposition establishes her right to both ask and answer questions. She rejects the claim, "No room! When the Mad Hatter and the March Hare refuse to give her a seat, she defies exclusion by exclaiming, "There's plenty of room!"(Carroll 62). She regularly questions the Hatter and March Hare's logic in their chats, even if she adheres to the overall schema of taking part in the tea ceremony. She exhibits her rhetorical prowess in these minor symbolic violations by refusing to be silenced or excluded. In their conversation, Alice then questions the Caterpillar's authority by refuting his enigmatic assertions and his haughty demeanour. The Caterpillar gives a quick command to "hold your wrath" (Carroll 44), but his cryptic words are often contested. This conversation is crucial because it shows that her "crime" is not a direct confrontation but rather her refusal to give in to words.

According to Gubar, Alice complies with power by redefining the situation as a game of cunning rather than just following the rules that are imposed on her. Another example of adventure emerging from apparent disarray is the croquet game in The Queen of Hearts. This ridiculous game, whose rules are subject to alter at the Queen's discretion, uses flamingos as mallets and hedgehogs as balls. Alice adjusts by moving around the rolling hedgehog and helping the flamingo alongside her rather than giving up the game out of irritation. She understands this is not compliance in the conventional sense; rather, it is a cunning use of the circumstances to keep playing and preserve her independence. Her determination in the midst of anarchic authority changes the environment from one of failure into a personal test and not a loss.

The apex of such adventurous heart comes at the courtroom. Facing Queen's absurd order, "Sentence first-verdict afterwards" (110), Alice will not oblige. Her quick retort, "Stuff and nonsense!" (110) breaks the formality of the trial. There, she has evolved from a shy young woman who had earlier measured the contents of a mysterious bottle to a fearless person who can now publicly expose the frailty of unfair authority. Wonderland's eventual collapse, which is the culmination of her development through a string of small-scale, rule-breaking adventures, is more of a psychological than a physical finale. Carroll portrays crime in these events as a means of learning rather than a moral failing. Every act of disobedience is a stage in Alice's self-directed path, when she gets to experiment with odd regulations, challenge authority, and develop her own sense of discernment. Gubar's observations assist in uncovering the fact that in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, such acts of trespassing are actually the cornerstone of the thrill and advancement of the story, the keystone of Alice's path to self-understanding.

As the story progresses, it seems that Alice's minor acts of defiance are not isolated incidents but rather a part of a sequence of events that progressively increase her self-assurance and independence. She is cautious at the beginning of her trip and will treat individuals she meets with over-politeness, as when she requests the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" (59). The respectful tone speaks to an assumption that the people she meets will have some kind of authority or higher knowledge. But as she gets answers such as "That depends a good deal on where you want to get

to,"(59) she comes to understand that most of Wonderland's power holders talk in riddles or impose random regulations, and she modifies her behavior in turn. When she encounters the part of the Duchess, she is prepared to express her own criticism of the folly of those with which she shares it, saying, "If everybody minded their own business, the world would go round a deal faster than it does" (56). This is not the defensive thought of the girl who initially sipped from the bottle but the assertive opinion of one who has become assured enough to speak authoritatively herself out. This last act of overt defiance brings down the authority of Wonderland and brings an end to an adventure in which all the lesser crimes, from challenging nonsense to defying unjust commands, have led up to this moment of final confrontation. Consequently, Carroll does not portray crime as a defect that needs to be corrected but as an inseparable element of the coming-of-age story of Alice as a Victorian child model of challenges that demonstrate to her how to think, talk, and act with confidence of a person that has challenged the conventions and dared to redefine them. By the time Alice wakes up on the banks of the river, experiences of traveling have provided her with a better sense of self and ability to approach the adult world on her conditions. She is no longer just a curious little girl who plays with a rabbit, but a lady who has been at court, at games, and in salons where authority was on a caprice and self-serving. All her symbolic crimes have been experiments with strength, a gesture of exploration.

Rather than labeling her as delinquent, they bear witness to her inventiveness and flexibility. Notably, Alice's "artful" manner at first was not quite in tune with the emotions of other people, specifically Wonderland's anthropomorphic creatures. When she encounters the Mouse by the Pool of Tears, she makes a nonchalant comment, "I wish I could show you my cat Dinah", complimenting Dinah as "she's such a capital one for catching mice" and continues, "Oh, I wish you could see her after the birds! Why, she'll eat a little bird as soon as look at it!" (23). Her naive pride in Dinah's hunting prowess has the unforeseen consequence of offending the Mouse, who swims away in fear. Afterwards, while discussing with the Mock Turtle the Lobster Quadrille, Alice is asked whether she has ever seen a lobster. She confesses to herself "she has once tasted it and found it 'very good', but she chooses not to mention this detail aloud" (90).

In each case, Alice moves through a social space in which conventions of tact are called into question. She makes use of past mistakes to learn how linguistic articulation can be misunderstood and how silence can operate as an intentional tactic. The sequences show that Alice's agency arises from an experimental relation to social life, as well as from her encounters with the Queen of Hearts and other figures. Her story confirms Gubar's suggestion that children can be co-creators of their own story within fiction, rather than helpless objects victimized by adult corruption or instruction. Carroll re-imagines criminality here as a generative force—an adventure in its own right—where resistance, experimentation, and even social failure become the sparks to childhood development. The "artful collaborator" engages with various forms of social order-both official and informal-in a mode that is at once creative and critical, rather than conducted in blind opposition to authority. Accordingly, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland emerges not merely as an entertaining fantasy but, rather, as a subtle meditation on the role of youthful transgression in speech, conduct, and judgment. Such transgression serves to redefine boundaries, assert agency within the greater social sphere, and enable the ongoing construction of the self.

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VOICE, VISIBILITY, AND VALIDATION: A STUDY OF *I AM VIDYA*

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Abstract

The very sight of transgender people fills us with an unknown kind of fear and awkwardness. We do not associate ourselves with them as their mere presence seems threatening. The reason behind this, understandably, is our perception of labelling them as outcasts. Shunned by their families and society, Transgender people are forced to live a life of misery. Their life is nothing short of a contradiction as they are invisible and, at the same time, hyper-visible. Due to their effeminacy and other gender expressions, their bodies are merely considered sites of pleasure, consequently making them the victims of abuse and exploitation in the most traumatic ways. This paper explores the complex and intersecting structures of oppression portrayed in Living Smile Vidya's autobiographical narrative, *I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey*.

Keywords: Transgender, Sex, Gender, Oppression, Intersectionality

The very sight of transgender people fills us with an unknown kind of fear and awkwardness. We do not associate ourselves with them as their mere presence seems threatening. The reason behind this, understandably, is our perception of labelling them as outcasts. We refuse to acknowledge their presence in our society. They are scoffed at and considered the objects of contempt and ridicule. Shunned by their families and society, Transgender people are forced to live a life of misery. Society refuses to regard them as humans in the first place. Their life is nothing short of a contradiction as they are invisible and, at the same time, hyper-visible. They are spurned as well as celebrated, despised as well as revered. They are oppressed and repeatedly subjected to inhuman practices. They are the muted, silenced, and subdued 'other'. Entirely sidelined and subjugated, it is hard for them even to find the means of survival as they are denied entry into the mainstream world. They represent the

'subaltern', the 'other' ensnared in the grasp of hegemonic powers, whether political, social, economic, or religious. Not finding themselves confined to the established binary of the sexes, transgender people are discriminated against and victimised to a great extent. There are not many job opportunities available for them; hence, they resort to either begging or sex work. They have to face beatings and abuse at the hands of rowdies and even the police at times. Since they are a gender minority, they are criminalised for no fault of their own, and many false accusations are foisted on them. They become the worst victims of ostracism due to the widespread stigma and discrimination attached to them. Transgender people as a community occupy the position of marginality and are completely neglected in nearly all spheres. Their personal narratives testify to the unsympathetic and insensitive conduct of society, revealing the structural exclusion and deep-seated prejudices that continue to inform public attitudes towards them. Anything that doesn't conform to the heteronormative matrix is considered to be abnormal and subsequently taboo. As transgender people are rendered invisible, unheard, and excluded from the mainstream, they can be labelled as subaltern. This paper examines the autobiography of an Indian trans woman by moving beyond testimonial reading and instead deploying an "invisible yet hyper-visible" analytical framework through which gender performativity, discursive power, caste, and subaltern voice can be read together. The paper argues that the text functions as a powerful act of self- representation through which Vidya reclaims her voice, challenges social invisibility and demands validation within a society structured by gender binaries and exclusion.

Transgender is an umbrella term that includes people whose gender identity and expressions do not match the sex assigned at birth. Their behaviour is, by and large, gender non-conforming and hence they are classified as the third gender. Since they are neither male nor female, they are placed in this social category of being a third gender. Transgender is also a part of the LGBT acronym or initialism, which is used as an umbrella term for various sexual identities defying the gender binary. A person is considered transgender when his or her biological sex is non–congruent with their gender identity, furthermore gender roles assigned to him or her. According to the American Psychological Association, "Transgender people experience their transgender identity in a variety of ways and may become aware of their transgender identity at any

age. Some can trace their transgender identities and feelings back to their earliest memories. They may have vague feelings of "not fitting in" with people of their assigned sex or specific wishes to be something other than their assigned sex. Others become aware of their transgender identities or begin to explore and experience gender non-conforming attitudes and behaviours during adolescence or much later in life."

Foucault and Butler highlight the notion that when we make categories, we participate in our own subjugation. According to them, institutions and discourses play a significant part in the construction of sexuality. Judith Butler dismantles the notion of considering sexuality as a primary component of human identity. In the theory of 'Gender Performance' or 'Gender Performativity,' she destabilises gender identities and categories as she considers gender as a social construct. According to Butler, gender is performative in that it brings gender into being through each repetition of gendered acts. Through the formation of binaries, a power structure is established that plays a major role in disregarding those who do not fall in this 'heterosexual matrix'. While Butler theorises gender as a repeated performance regulated by social norms, Vidya's experiences demonstrate how such performances are unevenly sanctioned on the basis of caste and class. She argues that performativity is embedded within the regimes of power rather than freely enacted.

Transgender people are the gendered subaltern as they have always occupied the position of marginality. Rather than speaking for themselves, they have always been spoken for by others. Their voices are often stifled and their narratives suppressed. They are never treated at par with heterosexual people and hence are ostracised at social, cultural, economic, and political levels. Heteronormativity, as a domineering force, represses the people who flout the gender binary, consequently inscribing inferior status to them. The neglected subjects are still colonised in one way or the other way. The construction of heterosexuality as normal and anything outside the binary as aberrant makes transgender people, in specific, and the queer in general, the gendered subaltern. Their voices rarely shape policies that directly concern their lives. There is a dire need to deconstruct the prevalent monolithic unit of analysis of sexualities. Transgender people are shackled on the grounds of gender as their gender identity does not match the sex assigned at birth.

The life writings of transgender people are replete with instances that marginalise the protagonists at social, physical, economic, cultural, and legal levels. Due to their effeminacy and other gender expressions, their bodies are merely considered sites of pleasure, consequently making them the victims of abuse and exploitation in the most traumatic ways. They are abandoned by their own families, battered, mentally tortured, and traded into prostitution. Lack of job opportunities leads them to brothels, with the only options of sex trade and begging. This paper explores the complex and intersecting structures of oppression portrayed in Living Smile Vidya's autobiographical narrative, *I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* (2014). It examines this text as a critical site through which the paradox of transgender existence in terms of social invisibility and hyper- visibility operates. The invisibility functions through exclusion from diverse spaces, whereas hypervisibility functions through ridicule and moral policing. This paradox operates across social, cultural and textual registers within the Indian transgender context where the transgender subjects are ignored and denied institutional recognition. The trans subjects are institutionally marginalised within family, education, employment and law, they are also rendered hyper-visible as spectacles of difference, moral tension and cultural curiosity. Vidya, a prominent Dalit Trans woman, theatre artist and a pioneering transgender rights activist from Tamil Nadu, is one of the first trans women in India to publish an autobiography. This book showcases the life of a transgender person, born as a man named Sarvanan. It foregrounds the journey of a woman trapped in a man's body and her fight to reclaim her identity through the attainment of 'Nirvana'. It also highlights the struggle of an individual in ascertaining one's identity after undergoing gender affirming surgery. Vidya mentions, "I was a woman trapped in a male body. Physically, I was no woman, but my thought processes when considering my future, my professional career, were those of a woman." She further describes transgender people as the Dalits of Dalits, the most oppressed women among women, as they enjoy no equality, no freedom, no fraternity (139).

In the life writings of transgender people, one can observe that their struggle to understand their bodies starts at a very early stage of their lives. They become the victims of gender policing as their behaviour is continuously under the scanner. They are imposed with certain stereotypical gender roles, and defying those

results in varied forms of harassment, verbal, mental, physical, as well as emotional. They are called names such as sissy, chakka, girly, and number nine. In all the texts by trans women, we observe that the protagonists were born as men, but they could not associate with their biological bodies. They felt more like the opposite sex. Although born as boys, they enjoyed the company of girls, liked emulating and playing with them. In our society, activities displaying strength and masculinity are expected to be performed by boys. They are expected to be unemotional, aggressive, and tough. Vidya recalls her childhood days and mentions "Other boys played the usual boys' games with marbles, tops, and kites, but I preferred to join the girls at their games- generally board games like dayakattam (the Indian version of Chinese checkers) and pallanguzhi. I loved playing girls' games and being one of them" (Vidya 23). She further tells how she enjoyed the company of female friends more than that of male friends. Born as a boy, Saravanan felt trapped in the wrong body. It was agonising for him to identify with the body he did not belong to. He found himself surrounded by various questions as he could not conform to the dominant gender roles associated with a boy. "What's wrong with my preferences? Why should a boy only wear shirts and trousers? I like skirts and blouses. Why can't I wear them? Why do people find something odd in what comes to me naturally?" (Vidya 22). His choice of clothing was unacceptable to the people around him as it not only challenged the dominant and prevalent genderism but also exposed his femininity. Genderism is reinforced when a child is expected to follow the traditional gender roles meant for his or her gender. Repetitive acts of following specific gender roles result in cementing them. The entrenchment of gender roles in the minds of people forces them to discipline any behaviour that threatens the existence of these roles.

Sex and gender have always been used interchangeably due to a lack of understanding of the layman towards these terminologies. The traditional binary of male and female is so entrenched in the minds of people that anything that goes beyond this binary becomes incomprehensible and subsequently aberrant for them. Since the day an individual is born, people around them start associating gender stereotypes with various beliefs and customs. The gender schema theory, propounded by Sandra Bem, an American psychologist, elucidates how gender specific roles are 'created' and 'validated' in society. At a young age, children

are taught to internalise and categorise gender roles, either as 'masculine' or 'feminine'. This paper explores the multiple dimensions of gender by examining the wide spectrum of gender identities that move beyond rigidity and conventionality. The range of identities refuses to be pigeonholed and subsequently asserts its fluidity. Trans narratives follow the complex journeys involving the metamorphosis of individuals at various levels. These bring forth the varied experiences of trans people, which include their struggles for the assertion of their identity and acceptance in society.

Gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation of an individual are seemingly similar yet distinct aspects of the personality. Gender identity involves a person's internal sense of being male or female, whereas sexual orientation involves those to whom one is attracted. Trans narratives hence emphasise gender fluidity and challenge the stereotypical approaches involving the sex and gender debate. How do we define one's gender? Gender comprises certain cultural, social, and behavioral characteristics of an individual that place that person in the category of a male or female. The gender binary depends on this demarcation, and it is only through this that various gender roles and gender expressions are assigned to people. The binary boy/girl or a man/woman is the monolithic structure used for identifying one's gender expression in various cultures. The people who do not fall in this binary sometimes embrace a part of the category labelled as third gender. Various feminist scholars in the 1970s argued on the distinction between the terms sex and gender, which were used interchangeably till then. Later, a clear distinction between biological sex and gender as a social construct came to light. With these changes came the emergence of various gender identities and expressions. Sex is associated with biological status. It is assigned at birth and is associated with physical traits and internal anatomy, such as chromosomes, hormones, etc. Gender represents the roles and behaviour that are socially constructed and are considered suitable for men and women. Gender identity is more of an internal phenomenon as it refers to one's internal sense of belonging to a particular gender. Whereas gender expression is how we communicate our gender identity to others through our mannerisms, clothing, behaviour, or other body characteristics.

The gender stereotypes are socially constructed in a heteronormative society. The ordeal of navigating through the constant pressure concerning their

sexuality terrifies people who do not fall in the gender binary. They find themselves vacillating between two bodies. The struggle of finding their true self and identity makes them vulnerable and, therefore, prone to depression. Heteronormativity is imposed through the choice of clothing and toys in the initial years of childhood. By earmarking certain colours, dresses, games, toys, as well as traits, a clear distinction is made between a boy and a girl. Heterosexist discourse is regularised through this gender policing. Gender policing hurts the well-being of transgender people. Furthermore, it exacerbates gender dysphoria among them. They become the victims of discrimination and estrangement. Vidya recalls her childhood days and writes, "My effeminate ways- hitherto an object of ridicule on my street- now became the target of my schoolmates' taunts. Even kids from lower classes teased me at school: 'Look at this lady,' they shouted after me. It became quite common for the boys to trouble me. I was still a bright student, but I was lonely throughout high school. My studies began to suffer" (24).

Lack of support and acceptance from society makes them prone to loneliness and depression. They start doubting their existence as they grapple with self-doubt and body image issues. Vidya describes her experiences of humiliation and verbal harassment meted out to her by the people around her. "My effeminate speech and behaviour, the fact that I preferred the company of girls, drew out the worst in them- they, like my schoolmates, started using my femininity as an excuse to insult me. It made me wary of the external world and increased my loneliness. I retreated to a world of my own creation" (23).

As children, it becomes difficult to deal with the questions that arise in the minds of transgender people. They face glares of displeasure from the people around them. The glances of onlookers are accompanied by taunts, ridicule, and acerbic jibes. They become the victims of unfriendliness and aloofness. Vidya remembers her sufferings and narrates the deleterious impact these things had on her. "The constant ridicule made school intolerable, and soon it became impossible to walk on the street as well. I was now completely alone" (26). Her choice of clothing was unacceptable to the people around her as it challenged the dominant and prevalent genderism. Genderism is reinforced when a child is expected to follow the traditional gender roles meant for his or her gender. Repetitive acts of following specific gender roles result in cementing

them. The entrenchment of gender roles in the minds of people forces them to discipline any behaviour that threatens the existence of these roles. She found herself surrounded by various questions as she could not conform to the dominant gender roles associated with a boy. "What's wrong with my preferences? Why should a boy only wear shirts and trousers? I like skirts and blouses. Why can't I wear them? Why do people find something odd in what comes to me naturally?" (22).

Vidya, being a theatre artist, actively performed on various stages, and it helped her rebuild her sense of self. It turned into her space of healing and reclamation as she turned her trauma into narrative and silence into voice. It was through her theatre groups that she got the courage to express and accept her inner feelings. She writes, "All the members of the troupe became my friends. On one occasion, I acted like a girl for the benefit of Maharasan and a couple of other university students. Actually, I was pretending to imitate a girl for fun, and they liked my 'acting'- but deep inside I was not really acting; I was subtly expressing my inner urges" (53).

Vidya, throughout the narrative, repeatedly recounts her manifold sufferings as she was targeted due to her sexuality as well as her caste. As a Dalit woman who was economically vulnerable, she was subjected to discrimination at multiple levels. Her autobiography foregrounds the lived realities of Dalit trans women and is a grave reminder of the grit and optimism of trans people. Furthermore, it illuminates the experiences of transgender individuals, revealing both systemic challenges and personal resilience. Engaging with such narratives can help foster understanding, inform equitable policies and amplify the voices of marginalized communities. There has to be a deeper recognition of transgender voices within literature, law, and public discourse. Vidya asserts the need for Trans identity and representation. " I do not ask for heaven— I am begging to be spared from living hell" (138).

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ANIMALITY IN MARVEL COMICS

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Abstract

Comics are creative works that use images and text. Features of comics include frames of cartoons with attractive colours and mind-boggling dialogues. Comics have animal allegories and imageries which portray anthropocentric views, where anthropocentrism means defining the entire cosmos from the human standpoint. Humans in Western philosophy are viewed as the polar opposite of animals. There exists an invisible binary which maintains and sustains the difference between the human and the animal. In an attempt to excel from the primitive animal condition, scientific research has enhanced the human predicament. According to Nietzsche, humans have a desire to excel from human to superhuman. Superhuman status was promised with technical advances that ensured renewed ability to fly like a bird, swim like a fish or run faster than a horse. With this new found capability, they were able to optimise the resources of the Earth and transform into superhuman, or perhaps become custodians of Earth and other nonhumans. The journey of humans is represented through different forms of media. One such is comics, where pictorial narrative revolutionised the anthropocentric view in Marvel superheroes comics like Spiderman, Batman, Catwoman, etc. These superheroes with a nonhuman gene were greatly proficient and extraordinary beings. The paper reads the representation of the superhero as a cultural identity, which is deeply rooted in human exceptionalism and branches out as an inconsistent, fluid admixture. Together, this paper problematises animality to warn against the dangers of human exceptionalism and celebrate hybridity.

Keywords : Anthropocentrism, Animality, Human Exceptionalism, Hybridity, Marvel Comics.

Introduction

Comics are innovative and creative artistic works that use colour, dialogue,

characters, and various other illustrative techniques to narrate and educate. It was in 1837 that the first comic book, *The Adventures of Obadiah,* was published in Switzerland by Rodolphe Topffer (Babic 2). It gained popularity almost immediately, and artists experimented with varied designs, vibrant colours, distinct themes and so on. Comics not only laid the foundation for newer artistic brilliance, it also paved the way for cinema and advertising campaigns to flourish. The early nineteenth century witnessed the birth of the cinema industry, along with it came the concept of preparing strips for movie shots, which in turn encouraged the publication of comic strips. Caricaturing, sketching, painting and other allied art forms were rekindled through comics. American comic series transformed with the advent of picture portrayal in pulp magazines. Pulp magazines with adventurous, romantic, and detective plotlines allured the readers, and they gradually shifted from reading bulky novels to comics. Studying the marketing strategies of comic books, Eric Yorkston and Xavier Dreze develop "a conceptual framework to explain how information presented in comics differs from other visual narratives." They believed comics have a distinct ability to manipulate spatial and temporal reality through sequential art and abstraction. Comic narrative contains epigrams and aphorisms to convey multifaceted information (Yorkston 11). This is true even when comics were printed in black and white.

Understanding Animality through Animals in Comics

Animals are an integral part of most stories. The presence of an animal adds validity and liveliness to the comics. The use of animal characters in comics, cartoons and cinema, according to Christine Kirsgaard, is an attempt 'to inseminate an empathetic outlook,' among the audience. Most stories aroused humane sentiments and filial emotions, condemned war and sought love, peace and solidarity (Kirsgaard). Walt Disney's first animated movie with Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck in 1922 was a household name. These characters were a hybrid of the animal and the human, these animals could speak like humans, walk with two legs, and do things with their own hands. Margo DeMello in *Animals and Society* explains anthropomorphism as "the attribution of supposedly human qualities to nonhuman animals" (DeMello 11). These anthropomorphic cartoons gained appreciation from viewers across the world

and became most watched source of entertainment for children. Studies to improve background music, voiceover, storyline, and so on were undertaken on a large scale. Cartoons like *Silly Symphonies*, *Goofy, Pluto, Bugs Bunny*, *Tom and Jerry, Looney Tunes* and many others comprised of characters that mimicked human ethics and values. The anthropomorphic characters encouraged the readers to sympathise and understand species-specific behaviour. For Herman, most comics have a combination of human qualities and animal instincts that blend to produce mixed emotions among the readers (Herman 8). One therefore, cannot deny that comics have animal allegories and imageries portraying anthropocentric views. That is, human beings are at the centre of the discourse, and all other beings exist mainly to serve human needs.

In *On the Origin of Species,* Darwin indicates human physiological, cultural and ideological transition as an important trajectory that shaped the world. Arising from apes to contemporary human, humans are always part of the animal phylum (Darwin iii). However, human exceptionalism argues to differentiate humans from animals. Discourse on exceptionalism is partly anthropocentric as it projects human thoughts, values and behaviours on nonhuman animals. Human ability to optimise Earth's resources ascribes humans a unique role and alters the narrative of animal subordination. This attitude of humans leads to the domination and control of animals and the rejection of animal sentience. Similarly, Tim Ingold, in his work on the domination of animals, comments insensitively that hunter-gatherers "lived like animals." On reconsidering the lives of humans who lived like animals, Ingold underlines the fallacy of comparing the hunter-gatherer stage of human beings with contemporary civilised globalised man. He discovers inconsistency in human identity and explains the problems of restricting animality as a condition confined to other nonhuman creatures and not to modern, civilised man. The notion of human exceptionalism infuses an invisible social divide constructed along the lines of cultural and historical contingencies that regarded humans as highly creative and talented (Ingold 14).

Having discussed the history of comics, anthropocentrism, anthropomorphism and human exceptionalism, the paper now focuses on the Marvel superhero characters. Popular superhero character *Spider-Man* has spider-like abilities, including the ability to climb walls, enhanced strength and

agility, and the ability to shoot webs using his hands. *Batman* has bat-like ability to fly (with the help of his cape), heightened senses, and the ability to see in the dark. On the other hand, *Catwoman*, a female superhero who possesses cat-like agility, reflexes, and senses, also has retractable claws. Her close ally, *Vixen,* could mimic the abilities of any animal she chooses, and has enhanced strength, agility, and senses. Other characters like *Ant-Man* can shrink down to the size of an ant and communicate with other ants. *Hawkman* has wings and can fly. These are some examples of the well-known anthropomorphic comics with superheroes or superhumans.

The Animal in Superhuman

Friedrich Nietzsche, in his 1833 work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* proposed *Ubermensch* or super human, as the ultimate goal of humanity to attain. His proposal was in opposition to the then Christian belief of salvation that depended on one's faith, moral actions and divine grace. He expressed his disregard for salvation after death and explained that accomplishment could be attained during one's lifetime alone. Admonishing the concept of another world, he suggests that his readers become Ubermensch or 'above man' or 'a super human' who lives in this very moment (Nietzsche Part 1, chapter 4). This paradigm shift was crucial as it paved the way for the conception of theories such as Nihilism, Marxism, Essentialism, and Modernism to study the intricate cultural meanings embedded in the large corpus of literary discourses. David Herman discovers that most Marvel characters display a trait to grow beyond the 'ordinary human.' Most characters are an amalgam of human and animal entities and present a combination of values and virtues that are universally applicable (Herman 11).

Perhaps, on tracing answers for who an ordinary human is and what makes one an extraordinary human, Annessa Ann Babic's book *Comics as History, Comics as Literature* highlighted the fact that "comics are an innovative cultural carrier that has laid the ground for serious academic discussions." In the same work, she quotes Dr Fredric Wertham, who claimed comics promoted dissociated behavioural traits. He identifies comics have harsh tone and rude behaviour with images of violence and hostility. The *Wonder Woman* comic series for Babic contains lesbian themes, and *Superman* comics encourage

delinquent behaviour (Babic 8). Critical appreciation of comic culture is now part of the academic practice, and this does not mean an end to the production of comics. In fact, by the 1980s, comics publication rose to the brim with *The Amazing Spiderman*. Academicians like Will Eisner took a closer look at comic traditions and called comic tales 'art with literary expression' (Maddison). Samuel R Delaney, a professor who has worked exhaustively on sci-fi and sexuality, seconded him and called comics "paraliterary works." A concept borrowed from Rosalind E. Krauss, who defined paraliterary work as a hybrid space that blurs traditional boundaries between literature and criticism (Krauss 293). Therefore, it is now evident that comics are complex narrations and more than just a hero defeating a villain. This paper tries to extricate the animal component of the superheroes and problematise human exceptionalism using Nietzsche's theory of *Ubermensch.*

Nietzsche disputes the human and the animal binary and believes that the human is an offshoot of animal classification. He identifies an innate urge of the human to transcend into *Übermensch* or superhuman as an attempt to do away with his animal instincts. Superman simply means something more than a man, a saviour-like figure that has superhuman powers over ordinary beings and circumstances. Superhuman, according to Nietzsche, is the cognitive excellence of the human being attained through technical advancement. Human beings are now capable of flying, swimming, running, and performing other activities assisted through technology and no longer restricted to nonhumans. This capacity of human beings enables them to optimise the resources of the Earth. They take on the exceptional role of superhumans, and act as the custodians of the 'great chain of beings.' Rûdiger Safranski expressed *Ubermensch* as an ideal for anyone who wishes to achieve higher standards in life. To succinctly put it, *Ubermensch* is a new standard set to categorise humans as an exception (Safranski). To understand the dangerous turn that human exceptionalism can take, one must recount the Holocaust. Adolf Hitler proclaimed his biological identity (the Aryan) to be superior, and his Nazi regime tried to wipe out the inferior Jewish ones. Similarly, when Marvel superheroes play on the idea of superhuman, the prodigal being, they downplay animality. DeMello notes that "human-animal divide to be a social construction."

The divide between human and animal is neither exclusively

> behavourial nor biologically determined distinction but has, at times included biology, behaviour, religious status and kinship. It is culturally and historically contingent; that is depending on time and place this border not only moves but also provides the reasons for assigning animals and humans to each side of the border change as well. (DeMello 33)

Say for example, the character Superman in a blue dress and red cap disguises himself as Clark Kent, a low-profile journalist. He hides his superhero identity to casually inform a superhuman living in the midst of the ordinary crowd. Thus, a superhero is a human being who is better than the other beings around him. Not only in terms of physical prowess, but also in terms of intellect, a superhero stands out in the crowd. Usually, this superhero takes birth from an ordinary human being but he will amplify the possibilities of human endeavour. Likewise, in Spiderman, Peter Parker is an ordinary man bitten by a radioactive spider. He tries to control his animal instincts, behave consciously and take moral responsibility for his actions. He plans his adventures, designs his web and disguises himself as though ashamed of his genetic modification. Catwoman has an urge to strike harder, move faster and react spontaneously. Her general animal instinct is translated as protective and caring behaviour. A superhero's attempts to improvise his new found abilities, combined with human rationale, are a step up to a superhuman condition. Thus, it would not be wrong to conclude that all superhero lore follows a common theme of an ordinary man turning into a being with great potential when inflicted with an animal gene. Immanuel Kant believed animals are instinct driven. When superheroes have an animal gene, and they try to control their urge to behave instinctively, they negotiate animality. This ability to self-restraint makes an ordinary human superhuman. Superheroes have a moral responsibility to fight the bad people and also to safeguard socio-religious emotions. The superhero, a saviour figure, positions himself as the divine ruler, a god-like entity with an unequal human-animal gene.

Conclusion

Matthew Calarco rejects the anthropocentric binary and argues for a new kind of relationship with animals, based not on animal ability, utility or

intelligence (Calarco 42). The superhero characters like Spiderman, Batman, Catwoman, Wolverine, and others are a hybrid of a human being and some animal. They act as a prosthesis for human-animal heterogeneity and become queer entities. There is a constant desire to outgrow the banal, ordinary human existence to something extraordinary with the help of an animal gene. If technological advances ensured an extraordinary human being, it also creates a human being with a varying human identity. The superhero exists in duality, in a combination, an ideology that disputes homogeneity and purity. The superhero is albeit for plurality and multispecies coexistence.

This human-animal amalgam is the custodian of animality and humanity on the one hand and a bridge for cultural values. Superheroes aim to establish a more profane and pious hybrid being that possesses humane values alongside animal sensibilities. Thereby nullifying the distinction and embracing a unique hybridity. This paper recommends a hybrid identity over a narcissistic attitude of reducing animality into subordination. The idea of *Ubermensch* does not exist in a vacuum; there is a rhetorical retelling of human superiority. The narrative of a superhero with animal genes disregards animals' instinctual behaviour and praises conscious controlled and disciplined behaviour of the human. As though trying to reinstate animal irrationality and human rationality, but the superhero with animal genes in reality promises a healthy blend of adaptability, hybridity and coordination. To say, for example, Spiderman's attire is an expression of human physiology crafted in a fabric designed with the help of technology. Thus, Spiderman is a disputed identity just like queer bodies, and also is an ontological entity for questioning the ordinary, banal and insipid desire for human exuberance. On the whole, a superhero is a fabricated idea that fractures human-animal binary.

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"Our Home is a Shot Boat": The Concept of Family and Home in Select War-torn Poetry of Ukraine

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Abstract:

It is true that war is a persistent state of fighting whose pervasiveness is beyond human imagination, as its impacts stretch not only to the battlefield but also to every facet of life, shuddering the deep-seated stability of all aspects of human existence. Especially, the lives of families, as well as their cherished homes, turn out to be an extended combat zone and become fleeting and vulnerable. Loss of home, forced displacement, separation from near and dear ones, abuses of fundamental rights and inexplicable agonies become common phenomena during war as it leaves permanent wounds on the social, political, cultural, and emotional health of every individual. During such hostile predicaments, literature turns out to be the voice of the oppressed sufferers who can do nothing but become silent spectators of the business of war. Poetry, during such a critical juncture, can be the messenger of the ruthless realities of time and Iya Kiva and Lyuba Yakimchuk, two Ukrainian poets, have proved it with their soul-stirring poems to tell the stories of some families living there who have lost both their loved ones and their physical dwellings during the prolonged Russia-Ukraine war.

This paper, with the help of a close study methodology, offers a nuanced understanding of the selected poems of Iya Kiva and Lyuba Yakimchuk to demonstrate how Russia's hostile invasion of Ukraine, both in 2014 and in 2022, has intruded on home and family life, perpetually reshaping and reproducing the core meanings of these two concepts. The study also tries to make the reader think about how the political milieu of a country during war creeps into the personal existence of the citizens, blurring the distinction between the two conditions and poisoning the very essence of humanity.

Key words: War, Trauma, Displacement, Family and Home

Introduction:

Russia and Ukraine are the two nations that seem to be perpetually boiling in the cauldron of the deadliest war on European soil since World War II, leaving both parties devastated externally as well as internally. Although Ukraine gained independence in 1991 from the Soviet Union, Russia still tries to keep hold of its sway over the political nuances of Ukraine and to maintain its aura on the country in its trajectory, creating pressure upon her from all perspectives (Sasse 3). Independent Ukraine, being considered by Russia as a major political hazard and a budding insecurity to the authoritarian administration in Russia, the latter has launched brutal attacks many times, including its full-scale invasion in 2022 and the annexation of Crimea from it. The approach of Russia towards Ukraine can be understood from the following lines of an interview given by a Ukrainian poet:

> Russia continues its imperial, colonial policy toward Ukraine, which it has pursued since the days of the Russian Empire and, subsequently, the Soviet Union. This comprises oppression of Ukrainian culture, banning the Ukrainian language or treating it as underdeveloped and suppressing freedom of expression by all measures and means, including torture. Over the last few centuries, Russian discourse on Ukrainians, whom they regard as an inferior category of Russian, and concerning the Ukrainian language, which they consider a ridiculous dialect, has been consistently imperial and aggressive. (Yakimchuk, "The Light is No Longer the Light It used to be" 84)

It is estimated that Russia has already occupied approximately 20% of the entire Ukraine and according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the *UN Refugee Agency,* more or less 10.6 million Ukrainian citizens have been forced to flee their homes, leading a life of unpredictability and constant apprehension about their existence as human beings (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). Like any other significant socio-political happenings, these bitter realities shaped by hostilities of war have also not escaped from the literary corpus of Ukraine. It is marked that the armed aggression between Ukrainian soldiers and Russian-backed separatist

forces in the Donbas region of Ukraine in 2014 has brought about an emergence of a unique and distinctive tendency in the current Ukrainian poetic landscape, i.e., the poetry of war.

The commencement of Russia's aggressive and full-scale war invasion against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, redirected the spotlight of present-day Ukrainian literary works by placing the matter of war at its central point. The war narratives have gained importance after the appearance of a lot of poets coming out voluntarily to the landscape of writings by depicting the diverse traumatic experiences caused by the hostility between the two nations. Their social roles and responsibilities have visibly undergone a momentous alteration owing to the theatrical circumstances of combats, and this move has instantaneously begun to be replicated in poetic composition, especially in the poems penned down by two famous contemporary Ukrainian muses, namely Iya Kiva and Lyuba Yakimchuk. They extensively deal with the subjects of home and family, mostly through the lens of the Russia-Ukraine war, subsequent displacement of people, as well as the traumatic impact on their psyche. Their literary efforts, especially the poetic words that bear the weight of resistance, seem to act as a psychic catalyst that reinforces and fortifies the Ukrainian retribution against "neo-imperialist Russia striving to subjugate Ukrainians and deprive them of their distinct identity" (Voznyuk 48). What binds these celebrated bards together is their individual experiences as persons in exile from different regions of eastern Ukraine, having- been forced to leave their homes and family that no longer assume stable meaning for them owing to the volatile conditions caused by the uncanny impacts of war. Their predicament as displaced writers empowers them to clearly see the socio-political condition of war-torn Ukraine as they appear to gain the capability to view their home through a fresh and "contrapuntal" (Said 172) perspective. It is apparent that during war, the initial victim is always the truth, and these poets respond to it by outlining in poetic compositions the bitter truth of war.

Objectives and methodology:

This paper, with the help of a close study methodology, offers a nuanced understanding of the selected poems of Iya Kiva and Lyuba Yakimchuk to demonstrate how Russia's hostile invasion of Ukraine, both in 2014 and in

2022, has intruded on home and family life, perpetually reshaping and reproducing the core meanings of these two concepts. The study also tries to make the reader think about how the political milieu of a country during war creeps into the personal existence of the citizens, blurring the distinction between the two conditions and poisoning the very essence of humanity. What makes this research paper significant and notable for the existing scholarship is that its quest is not limited to probing into the impact of war on the Ukrainian people as a whole, but to chart out how, in a war-ravaged environment, relationships both with living individuals and with non-living entities like homes are twisted and transformed, assuming new meanings.

The concept of home and family: Ukrainian perspective

The notion of home bears profound meaning for the people of Ukraine, especially during the war between Russia and Ukraine. It is a space being violated perpetually as the ongoing war has changed not only the physical shapes of the dwelling places—normally identified as home—by striking with bombs and rockets, it has altered the very essence of rootedness, security and cosiness one can feel within the four walls. It is a "threatened area" which is beyond any kind of protection for human lives. War is "not just a natural disaster or cold, from which four walls and a roof over the head can protect, [it] is the horror of death, unpredictable missile trajectories, bomb strikes, mortar attacks" (Belimova 23). For most of the people of Ukraine, the notion of 'home' seems to be holistic, as home is acutely entangled with their cultural as well as private identity that takes into account the time-honored practices like gardening or spending quality time in the native woods and forest areas. But the war has radically cut off these pious links, as vast green areas are severely smashed, polluted with mines and smoke, or admittance to these shelter areas is strictly constrained owing to the ongoing antagonistic ambience all over the region, leading to a sense of loss and emotional distress being felt by the citizens.

> Prior to the war, natural spaces such as forests, gardens, and water bodies provided emotional solace, recreational opportunities, and spaces for family and social bonding. Many respondents highlighted their deep cultural connection to the local environment, including spiritual ties to nature, often referring to it

> as their 'home'. …The war disrupted family and community practices that depended on the natural environment, eroding traditions and communal activities – such as celebrating cultural events – that had previously reinforced social bonds and collective identities. The destruction of forests, gardens, and water bodies caused profound cultural dislocation and grief. (Elbakidze 10)

Again, when we talk of loss of physical space or home, it is apparent that the idea of family is inseparably linked with it since war does not permeate into the rooms and apartments; it moves stealthily into the very heart of the family, making it fragile and tearing it apart without leaving any hope for reunion. War disintegrates and displaces family members from their comfortable abodes of living and compels them to accept their individual destinies. It (war) has its individual tendency and its own right to get in the way with the plans and goals of people, redirecting everything in accordance with its own intervention. Human beings sometimes simply become spectator to their plans and progress and surrender to their respective destiny.

The poets like Iya Kiva and Lyuba Yakimchuk, who happened to be the victims of war antagonism and lost family members and their respective habitats in Ukraine, take recourse to their writings to depict the authentic meaning of a home as well as family during this period of humanitarian crisis. In this attempt, the memory of the glorious past confronts the cruelty of the war-torn moments of the present. Their poems have made it possible to represent the psychic trauma and pain both of the individual and the collective, by intimately mirroring the loss of family lives as well as the shattering of peace and tranquility people used to have in their respective homes prior to the commencement of Russian aggression. It never fails to bring out the elegiac representation of the entire accounts of conflict in a tangible and comprehensible manner.

Iya Kiva:

Iya Kiva is one of the well-known figures in the current poetry of Ukraine whose works are the best embodiment of understanding the concept of home and family life in war-ruined Ukraine. Raised in a Russian-speaking milieu in the Donetsk region, Kiva was forced to escape this place, leaving everything behind and eventually lived like a refugee of war in Kyiv, Ukraine. This bitter

personal experience, leading to her painful separation from her home and family members, has left a permanent imprint on her psyche, which is reflected in her poetic composition. She also has witnessed a large number of friends and acquaintances perish under the uncanny environment of war, whereas she was personally threatened for vehemently protesting and incessantly writing about the hostile situation. Her poetry collection *Poetid'Ucraina* (*Poets of Ukraine)* displays a brutal scrutiny of the most excruciating aspects of covert and overt reality as well as the dire outcome of warfare in the individual and the societal life. The poetic masterpieces of Iya Kiva have authentically delineated "the incredible significance of home and her longing for it after losing it, the search for identity and historical memory and the questions raised in turbulent times" (qtd. in Kazimirova and Anastasieva 161). She seems to be nostalgic about home, which bears a certain pleasant smell for the owners; when the war crossed its threshold, the pleasant aroma jumped out of the window, leaving only the pungent sulfurous smell within its rooms. In an interview published in *SuspilneKultura,* a Ukrainian TV Channel, Kiva compares the loss of the familiar and specific odor of a home during war with the odorless situation people suffering from Covid-19 experience.

She has acknowledged the futile attempt to find her home separated from the then political state of affairs because within eight years (2014 to 2022), the war has intensely encroached into every corner of the building and has become no longer an external entity. Her home is now indistinguishable from war, suggesting a profound, intrinsic, and omnipresent state of conflict or disturbance prevailed. She says in the poem "Eight Years of Saying: Back Home There is A War", "Eight years of saying: back home there is a war/ So I finally accept: my home is war." (Kiva, "Eight Years" 1-2).

Again, the poem "Refugees. Station", written in the same vein, portrays how war has spread through even the most cherished and personal space. Even in the "postcards from family albums," "war always sits in all the chairs" (Kiva, "Refugees Station" 11).

Addressing the Russian-Ukrainian war and the subsequent loss of home with vivid metaphor, she has hinted at a curse that is everlasting and hardened, akin to baked clay, indicative of the eternal and consistent nature of the suffering and trauma of Ukrainian citizens: "We are in trouble like the burning mine that

Eastern Europe/ In whose lungs houses are the baked clay of a curse" (Kiva 1-2).

Her another significant poem, "Town of Childhood", is an unambiguous demonstration of the themes of personal memory, loss of familial connection, as well as eventual longing for a past home that is the epitome of security and unadulterated love of family. Here in "Town of Childhood," she depicts the childhood settlement as a "parental glove, onto which our memories are imprinted" signaling how past reminiscence can become a form of convenient, internal home when the material location of it is now nowhere accessible. Her works are the best testimony to showcase how war tears apart not only buildings, doors and windows, but the familial bonds also. This poem appears to employ suggestive as well as strange imagery like "the milk of silence" and "the rye bread of loneliness" (Kiva, "Town of Childhood" 11) to meditate on a profound sense of yearning and the perpetual effort to keep hold of one's sense of home, belongingness and memory after being required to depart.

Lyuba Yakimchuk

Like Iya Kiva, Lyuba Yakimchuk's poetic composition often articulates her invariable yearning for home and family members, using vivid imagery of reminiscence, forced displacement, and the daily struggle for continued existence amidst the tumultuous predicament of war. Born and brought up in the closed vicinity of Luhansk region in Ukraine, Yakimchuk lost her family members with a heavy heart in 2014 when the entire area was forcefully taken up by the Russian militants, compelling her parents and her younger sister to escape as refugees. She used to have an immediate experience of war and displacement as she had painfully witnessed her apartment block being demolished in the blink of an eye by the rival force, crushing all her desire to enjoy the warmth and affection of family life. The continuous assault with grenades and artillery in her hometown, Luhansk, has left an unforgettable scar in her psyche during her childhood days. In the poem "Ashtray" included in the poetry collection *Apricots of Donbas,* she articulatesthe traumatic memories of home that trouble her mind all the time:

no longer a building
no longer a home

to mom, to dad, to me
to the vegetables in the fridge
not a home, not a fortress
no longer of four walls
(barely even fit to be a suitcase
or a backpack)
now—a big sooty
ashtray
for a god
who inhales the smoke
and let's fruit flies out of his mouth (Yakimchuk, "Astray" 1-13)

The vivid symbol of an ashtray indicates how Russian missiles and rockets have turned their buildings into big containers for ashes coming from the burnt areas.

It is seen that Yakimchuk grieves the destroyed properties and residential areas, also the way his heart weeps, having seen the suffering of people. In the poem "Skyscrapers," she underscores the hidden wounds of homes as follows:

stitch the wounds on your building
with white bandages cover up
black burns on its pelt
with a hand — just don't twitch —
shield the gaping mouths of windows
so marauders won't get in (qtd. in Rewakowicz 1-6)

Here, Ukrainian poet Anna Malihon's statement "Our home is a shot boat" (qtd. in Belimova 23) appears to be an ideal metaphor to precisely understand these hidden wounds, as said by Yakimchuk in the above lines. The way a boat being shot by missiles has to bear larger holes in it, which in turn makes it difficult to fulfill the boat's natural purpose or function to sail on the river, Ukrainian homes being destroyed by grandees and missiles also fail to provide the owner and his/her families the secure and cosy space to live in.

Yakimchuk's longing for a home with its pre-war vibes and ambience seems to be pressing, which is reflected in "The Return".

We want to go back home, where we got our first grays
where the sun pours into windows in blue rays

where we planted a tree and raised a son
where we built a home that grew moldy without us
(Yakimchuk, "The Return" 1-4)

What is remarkable in Yakimchuk's contemplation is her confident outlook amidst war to regain the antebellum family life when she says in one of her poems, "The Return".

We will walk back, even with bare feet
if we don't find our home in the place where we left it
we will build another one in an apricot tree
out of luscious clouds, out of azure ether.
(Yakimchuk, "The Return" 13-16)

Though Yakimchuk yearns to go back home, which was once a place of tranquility and freedom, she is simultaneously conscious of the impossibility of doing so, as everything gets toppled down now. Her poignant reflection of this bitter fact is marked in the poem "Cats"

breath falters
cough worsens
heart leaps
but doesn't jump out
because I'm heading straight home
straight on
but I never ever get home (qtd. in Hatfield 10)

Lyuba Yakimchuk seems to be seriously worried for her family as she has seen the disintegration of it similar to that of her home, owing to the long-lasting war. Her poem "Prayer" is preoccupied with her intense plea to God, longing for family protection and safety in the course of war. She wants heavenly protection for her parents, who refuse to abandon their home, which is, as if, a "tomb"(16) itself.

shield from death my parents
whose house stands in the line of fire
and who won't abandon it
like a tomb. (Yakimchuk, " Prayer" 4-7)

The poem "How I Killed" by Lyuba Yakimchuk is a clear indication of the fact that, though war is generally thought to be happening between the

armies of two opposing parties, in reality, it intrudes into the lives of each and every individual, as everything is under surveillance. The poet talks about the risk and perilous situations of getting in touch, even with separated family members during war, since every word in a telephonic discussion is wiretapped and is considered suspicious.

I remain connected to my family over the phone
with all of my family connections wiretapped
they are curious: whom do I love more, mom or dad?
(Yakimchuk, "How I Killed" 1-3)

The question asked by the poet in the above lines, "whom do I love more, mom or dad?"(149), embodies the extreme and life-or-death pressure felt by family members. Nothing remains private and everything is embedded with perilous outcomes. Although in the poetic depiction of both the poets, readers can find the unimaginable destruction of war and a vivid portrayal of the Donbas region as a war zone in Ukraine, there is a fundamental difference in the treatment of the same subject by Iya Kiva and Lyuba Yakimchuk.

Yakimchuk frequently employs linguistic deconstruction to portray the poetic landscape of the breaking of cities and human identities. In one of her poems entitled "Deconstruction", she depicts how the linguistic reconfiguration itself is necessary to depict thereconfiguration of the concept of home and family during war. Here, she purposively *decomposes the language of the poem*, breaking downthe words into meaningless syllables. Even her language has fallen apart like the fall of towns and cities around her. She says,

Don't talk to me about Luhansk
it's long since turned into hansk
Lu had been razed to the ground
to the crimson pavement (Yakimchuk, "Decomposition" 5-8)

Unlike Yakimchuk, Iya Kivais seen to use simple and uncomplicated language to describe the same traumatic experiences.She seems to emphasize on plain and direct speech over sophisticated metaphors endeavoring to establish clarity and precision.Despite this subtle but significant dissimilarity in the treatment of war by the two esteemed bards of Eastern Ukraine, what can be conspicuously observed is their use of poetry as an authentic medium of recording the harsh truth of wartime reality, opposing the dehumanizing results

of warfare. For both of them loss of home is akin to loss of human identity that inflicts unimaginable pain and trauma.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, it is evident that the literary distinctiveness of Ukraine is being fashioned today by the ongoing upheaval of war and combats within the territory of poetic expression. War has essentially shaped and reshaped the physical as well as emotional landscape of 'home', disintegrating families, leading to a predicament where reunion to its previous comfort and contentment is beyond imagination. It is a time when everyday objects are assuming new meanings since homes and household areas have perpetually turned out to be new battlegrounds. The violent collision of personal life with geopolitical realities of war has shattered not only families and homes but the entire country, placing it on a volcano ready to erupt at any point of time, allowing none to escape. The poetical utterances of Iya Kiva and Lyuba Yakimchuk do not fail to respond to such predicament, making the poetic voices to be heard by the entire world so that it can herald justice to the Ukraine prevailing peace and autonomy as well as tranquility between the two independent nations. Though their poetic echoes do not bring material changes to the battlefield but it is evident that their roles are similar to that of barometers to the psyche of the country; despite the fact that they cannot alter the weather, they can definitely demonstrate to the entire world what the weather is akin to. Their respective functions as an emblem of inspiration to the oppressed people of the land and as the befitting testimony of their shared trauma of war can never be pushed to the bosom of oblivion.

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